

APA Newsletters

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Spring 2002

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Feminism and Philosophy

Andrea Nicki, Guest Editor

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FROM THE EDITOR

Joan Callahan

Current Issue: "Feminist Virtue Theory and Ethics," Andrea Nicki, Guest Editor

Future Thematic Issues: "Diversity and Its Discontents," Fall 2002, guest edited by Barbara Andrew; and "Feminism as a Meeting Place: Analytic and Continental Traditions," Spring 2003, guest edited by Anita Superson.

Call for Papers for the *Newsletter*, Fall 2003: The Fall 2003 issue will be open. Papers for that issue need to be submitted to the Editor by February 1, 2003.

About *The Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy*

The Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy is sponsored by the APA Committee on the Status of Women (CSW). The *Newsletter* is designed to provide an introduction to recent philosophical work that addresses issues of gender. None of the varied philosophical views presented by authors of *Newsletter* articles necessarily reflects the views of any or all of the members of the Committee on the Status of Women, including the editor(s) of the *Newsletter*, nor does the committee advocate any particular type of feminist philosophy. We advocate only that serious philosophical attention be given to issues of gender and that claims of gender bias in philosophy receive full and fair consideration.

Submission Guidelines and Information

1. Purpose: The purpose of the *Newsletter* is to publish information about the status of women in philosophy and to make the resources of feminist philosophy more widely available. The *Newsletter* contains discussions of recent developments in feminist philosophy and related work in other disciplines, literature overviews and book reviews, suggestions for eliminating gender bias in the traditional philosophy curriculum, and reflections on feminist pedagogy. It also informs the profession about the work of the APA Committee on the Status of Women. All articles submitted to the *Newsletter* must be limited to 10 double-spaced pages and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language. Please submit four copies of essays, prepared for anonymous review. References should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

2. Book Reviews and Reviewers: If you have published a book that is appropriate for review in the *Newsletter*, please have your publisher send us a copy of your book. We are

always in need of book reviewers. To volunteer to review books (or some particular book), please send a CV and letter of interest, including mention of your areas of research and teaching.

3. Where to Send Things: Please send all articles, comments, suggestions, books, and other communications to the Editor: Professor Joan Callahan, c/o Women's Studies, 112 Breckinridge Hall, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40506-0056. If you want to send materials by email, this is fine, but please be sure that they are in Microsoft Word. Send to: buddy@uky.edu.

4. Submission Deadlines: Submissions for Spring issues are due by the preceding September 1st; submissions for Fall issues are due by the preceding February 1st.

NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Nancy Tuana, CSW Chair

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The Committee on the Status of Women met in October to create a list of priorities. Along with ongoing projects, we have identified four projects that we view as priorities over the next few years—carework and professionalism; the statistical surveys recently conducted by the APA; mentoring for diversity; and the relationship between the Diversity Committees and the new Committee on Inclusiveness.

Priorities

Carework and Professionalism

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) recently proposed a "Statement of Principles on Family Responsibilities and Academic Work" (<http://www.aaup.org/re01fam.htm>) to address conflicts between work and family obligations, which are often acute for women faculty. Many women faculty are intensively involved in caring for an ill relative or giving birth and raising children during their academic careers. Although men faculty can also be affected by these events, given that traditional gender allocations of carework remain resistant to change, and given that pregnancy, childbirth, and child rearing most commonly occur during the same years that college faculty are seeking tenure, carework is more likely to have an impact on the careers of academic women.

The Committee on the Status of Women is investigating various family care and leave policies including those proposed by the American Association of University Professors. We are also investigating the impact of increased standards of productivity for tenure and promotion. These inflated standards hit hardest on academic women who have family care responsibilities prior to tenure. It is our intention to share the results of our research with the APA Board of Officers and request that the APA consider supporting a statement concerning this issue.

Statistical Surveys

The APA recently sent out surveys to faculty, graduate students, and department chairs. The Committee on the Status of Women has been in contact with the APA about these surveys, both to determine how the data will be quantified and whether the surveys will be updated.

The CSW can be effective in tracking the location and success of women in the profession only if we are provided with data that enables us to answer questions such as the following: How many philosophy departments have a representative number of women in the ranks of assistant professors? In the ranks of associate professors? In the ranks of full professors? How many departments that have a representative number of women in the above areas are research universities? What is the number of dissertations chaired by women in the last 10 years? It is our request that the APA ensure that such data be tracked on any subsequent surveys and provided to the Chair of the CSW.

Mentoring for Diversity

The Committee on the Status of Women continues its collaboration with the new APA Committee on Inclusiveness to host a series of panels on mentoring for diversity. It is our belief that recruitment for diversity can only be successful when retention issues are taken seriously. This series of panels begins an ongoing effort to provide APA members with resources for mentoring that will enhance not only recruitment for diversity but also retention of those students and faculty so recruited.

Current plans include panels at each of the divisional meetings followed by a series of recommendations to be posted on the APA webpage.

The Relationship Between the Diversity Committees and the Committee on Inclusiveness

We believe that addressing the problems of underrepresentation in the profession must be a responsibility of the APA as a whole and requires the insights of members expressly charged by the Association to study the complexities of diversification across the various groups currently represented by the Diversity Committees. Last year, the Diversity Committee Chairs forwarded a motion to the Board of Officers urging the creation of a Standing Committee charged with increasing the diversity of the profession. The Diversity Committee Chairs argued for the importance of such a Standing Committee on the grounds that it would make the diversity of the profession a charge of the APA and allow the Diversity Committees, who are already overworked, to focus on the specific needs of our constituencies, knowing that issues of intersectionality will be taken up by this Standing Committee. This Committee has been approved by the APA membership and is now a Standing Committee, the APA Committee on Inclusiveness.

The charge of the Committee on Inclusiveness includes working in conjunction with the Diversity Committees, but no formal mechanism currently exists to ensure this collaboration. The Committee on the Status of Women has proposed to the APA that Diversity Committee Chairs sit as non-voting ex officio members of the Committee on Inclusiveness to insure that lines of communication are clear and that there is a precedent for joint meetings. We are still discussing this issue with the National Office and with the Committee on Inclusiveness.

Committee on the Status of Women Recent APA Sessions

Eastern APA 2001: "Mentoring for Diversity: A Workshop for Those Interested in Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Faculty and Student Population on Philosophy," a session sponsored by the Committee on the Status of Women and the Chairs of the Diversity Committees. Panelists: Claudia Card, Gary Mar, Lucius Outlaw, Ofelia Schutte, Anita Silvers, and Anne Waters

Eastern APA 2001: "Family Values," organized by Cynthia Willett. Speakers: Howard McGary, "Family Values and Race: Equality of Opportunity and Family Autonomy"; Laurence Thomas, "Parenting as a Moral Power"; and Barbara Andrew, "Family Values: Market Value and Moral Worth." Commentator: Lina Buffington

Pacific APA 2002: "Gender and Terrorism," a panel organized by Susan Brison and cosponsored by the APA Committee on the Status of Women and the Society for Philosophy and Public Affairs. Panelists: Robin Morgan, Virginia Held, Carol Gould, and Angelia Means.

Central APA 2002: "Bodies and Identities: Issues in Feminism and the Philosophy of Body," a panel organized by Laura Duhan Kaplan. Papers: "Bodies and Substitute Bodies," Rosemarie Tong; "Damaged Bodies, Damaged Identities," Hilde Nelson; "Healthy Bodies and Social Identity," Laura Duhan Kaplan. Commentator: M. Carmela Epright

Thanks

The Committee on the Status of Women would like to thank Elizabeth Radcliffe and the National Office for supporting the October 2001 meeting of the Committee. A hearty thanks to Linda Smallbrook for her excellent work with arrangements.

APA COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN, 2001-2002

Chair:

Nancy Tuana (2003)

Members:

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Nancy Fraser (2002)

Laura Duhan Kaplan (2003)

Jane Kneller (2004)

Diana T. Meyers (2003)

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Ex Officio

Joan Callahan, Editor of the *APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy*

ARTICLES: FEMINIST VIRTUE THEORY AND ETHICS

Andrea Nicki, Guest Editor

Introduction: Feminist Virtue Theory and Ethics

Andrea Nicki

Springfield College

Feminist philosophers have for long been preoccupied with formulating theories that respond to the damaging effects of various forms of oppression as well as developing strategies of resistance. Philosophers writing in the area of feminist virtue theory and ethics jostle or rearrange in different orders of importance or emphasis traditional moral virtues and vices in response to victimization and pain as part of a strategy to challenge oppressive values and practices. The authors writing in this issue of the *Newsletter* are concerned with identifying particular moral virtues that are especially relevant in the goal to end all forms of oppression; with challenging Western, racial, gender and class biases in traditional conceptions of moral virtues; and with challenging conceptions of some traditional moral vices and their alleged inevitable destructiveness.

Lisa Tessman argues that those who are lacking in traditional moral virtues—"the wicked"—can only enjoy their lives if they maintain an epistemic ignorance of their true "wicked" natures, based on a belief of themselves as morally good that is supported by similar others who are also committed to maintaining their privilege. Tessman recommends that one cultivate a (meta) moral virtue that would involve a disposition to be sensitive to the well-being or suffering of those lacking one's privilege.

Joan Woolfrey argues for the recognition of the moral virtue of feminist awareness, a disposition to draw attention to gender inequalities and practices. Exercising this virtue involves acting with Aristotelian moderation and practical wisdom. Woolfrey emphasizes the importance of feminist education and of cultivating continual awareness of one's and other's social markers in every interaction to produce responses that are sensitive, well-informed and inclusive.

Wendy Donner argues provocatively that wrath, and not simply moderate anger, can be morally good. Drawing on Buddhist teachings, she distinguishes anger as a creative force that arises from and is fuelled by compassion and that resists oppression from anger as a destructive force that involves aggression and brutality toward others. Controlling and subduing the full power of wrath can compromise the exercise of the virtue of feminist awareness and leave one with forgiveness and loving-kindness that are premature, as well as oppressive practices and abuses without vital opposition.

My own paper focuses on the creative potential of envy when informed by self-respect and compassion. I challenge the traditional (Ancient Greek) view of moral progression as necessarily involving an ever-increasing, harmonious expression of traditional moral virtues. I also advocate the inclusion of another moral exemplar in moral thought—a survivor of serious injustices who, previously despairing, achieves envy, rage, indignation, compassion and love.

Finally, Sandra Bartky boldly investigates and reevaluates the traditional moral vice of adultery in the context of the growing sexual self-determination of women and generally less sexually repressive cultural climate. She argues that in order for marital infidelity to be less of a vice and offset potential negative consequences, the non-adulterous spouse must exercise the moral virtues of patience, forbearance and understanding while the adulterous spouse must exercise the moral virtue of honesty.

Do the Wicked Flourish? Virtue Ethics and Unjust Social Privilege

Lisa Tessman

Binghamton University

I

In this paper I intend to analyze the lives of members of privileged groups through the lens of virtue ethics. In particular, I am wondering whether privilege that is conferred on a person because of his/her social positioning brings the wonderful and coveted things that one might expect it to: does it bring the ultimate good, namely, does it enable a person to flourish, to lead a/the good life? From Socrates's insistence (contra Thrasymachus) that the unjust cannot be happy, to the more contemporary, popular wisdom that "money don't buy you love," there is a history of suspicion about the goods that social, political, or economic power can bring. Perhaps what members of groups that are structurally positioned to exercise power have is not truly privilege; if they cannot lead flourishing lives, what good are the so-called advantages that they have?

Socrates's belief that the unjust cannot lead the good life constitutes a core assumption of virtue ethics. As Aristotle

more fully argues, flourishing depends upon virtue; eudaimonia is an “activity of the soul in accordance with virtue” (NE 1098a17). While this claim that the “wicked” cannot flourish has been much discussed in the literature on virtue ethics, I am interested here in a very particular, contextualized implication of it: if the claim is correct, then members of structurally privileged groups can only flourish if they are morally good.

However, although the privileged may enjoy especially ample opportunities to develop certain virtues,¹ it is at the same time hard to conceive of the privileged as morally good, because the so-called “privileges” that are under consideration here are those that result from unjust social positionings, positionings that depend upon systems of male dominance, white supremacy, class divisions under capitalism, norms of heterosexuality, and so on. Although to some extent one might unwillingly and hence innocently be a recipient of privileges that come with one’s position, generally speaking it takes having some vicious (“wicked”) characteristics—including at least a passivity with respect to the injustice of one’s privileges—in order to maintain oneself in a position of dominance. I will focus here on people who not only belong to dominant groups but who actively maintain their dominant positions and unjustly exercise power, or even engage in violence or abuse, against subordinate groups: the sexist or misogynist who thinks himself more important than or superior to women, or who discriminates against women or fights against measures to equalize women’s status, or even the one who batters or rapes women; the racist who spreads harmful stereotypes about people of color, who arranges his/her life so as to avoid contact with people of color, who supports policies that further disadvantage people of color, or who gathers with others in hate groups and terrorizes people of color on the street; the wealthy capitalist who exploits the labor of working people while remaining unsympathetic to the hardships of their strenuous, unsafe, or deadening working conditions, who resists redistributive measures that would equalize wealth. The people I am focusing on are not rare specimens, nor are they so common that they encompass just about everyone. Given my portrayal of them above, it would be hard to deny that they exhibit moral vices (such as cruelty, greed, self-centeredness, arrogance, cowardice) or at least the absence of certain specific moral virtues (perhaps compassion, generosity, cooperativeness, openness to appreciating others).²

If virtue theories are correct to assume that moral virtue is necessary for flourishing, then these people (the “wicked”) are far from ever attaining the good life. However, this is an odd claim to add to a theory of oppression, which one would expect to explain how the *victims* of oppression—rather than its beneficiaries—are denied a shot at the good life. I have argued elsewhere³ that under a virtue ethics framework, one can conceive of the conditions of oppression as creating systemic barriers to flourishing, namely barriers that the victims of oppression run into; while these barriers consist primarily of external, structural features of the society, a virtue ethics approach suggests that there are also barriers to flourishing that become internal to the victims of oppression. That is, oppressed people typically experience systemically based moral damage because conditions of oppression may stunt the development of some of the virtues.⁴ This description of oppression does not entail blaming the victim; rather, under

this description, one of the harms of oppression is that it is psychologically—and characterologically—damaging to oppressed people, which in turn diminishes their possibilities for leading flourishing lives.⁵

If people who are in positions of social, political or economic dominance also are unable to flourish because of a lack of moral goodness, then the claim that the oppressed are especially harmed by being morally damaged loses some of its force. Oppression seems to equally, though in quite different ways, affect everyone’s chances at developing the virtues and—if one accepts the connection between virtue and flourishing—thus negatively affects everyone’s chances at leading a/the good life. Oppression is not, according to this line of thinking, particularly more harmful (at least in this respect) to its victims than it is to its perpetrators.⁶

II

Since it seems to be a mistake to maintain that oppression operates in this way, I return to the title question: do the “wicked” get to flourish? One difficulty in answering this question comes from a lack of clarity about what is meant by human flourishing or by the good life. What I will argue is that those who exhibit the vices associated with maintaining privilege do not get to flourish in anything like the Ancient Greek understanding of the term; however, the contemporary meaning of the word “happiness” is quite unlike eudaimonia or flourishing. And, the contemporary context permits for “happiness” without moral virtue, and certainly without requiring a unity of the virtues.⁷ Given this, it turns out that members of dominant groups are in fact beneficiaries of oppression. They get to be vicious and still lead happy lives. Thrasymachus’s world has, so to speak, materialized.

Thrasymachus and Socrates differ on the question of whether it is through justice or injustice that one can be happy, because at base they differ on the question of whether happiness is attained alone or in harmony and unity with others. For instance, on the Socratic view a ruler is held back from flourishing as long as his [*sic*] subjects are living wretched lives (*Republic*, 341b-343d);⁸ or, to quote the contemporary parallel from a bumper sticker, “no one is free while others are oppressed.” On the Socratic (or more widely Ancient Greek) view, the connection between moral virtue and human flourishing can be made because any one person’s moral virtue is understood in the context of a community/*polity* that depends on the virtue of its citizens in order to flourish as a whole. And, in turn, belonging (as a member in good standing) to a strong, flourishing polity is partly constitutive of leading a good life for any particular member of the *polity*. This is the Ancient Greek assumption that is key to the central claim of virtue ethics that one must be good to lead a good life. One’s goodness secures one a proper place in the polity; it is only within the polity that one’s life can be assessed, and the assessment depends upon the (good) *polity’s* (correct) understanding of what it is to be good, and what the good life is. For instance, one might be judged to be flourishing as a good citizen, or even further, as a good man [*sic*].⁹ This is an objective assessment: a man [*sic*] might, for instance, believe himself to be happy/flourishing when he is not.¹⁰

III

Contemporary theoretical developments of virtue ethics frequently focus on the question of whether it is really the case that one must be good in order to lead a good life. Indeed, separated from the Ancient Greek context, the claim that flourishing requires virtue seems quite implausible. These contemporary approaches often ignore or explicitly reject the assumption that the good life can only be achieved collectively, and pursue the question of whether moral goodness is “good for” the individual by asking whether moral goodness is *beneficial* to a self-interested individual, an individual who is also assumed to subjectively determine what will count as happiness in an assessment of his/her own life.¹¹

Indeed, this seems like the right approach now that conditions of and assumptions about life have changed so dramatically from the Ancient Greek context. There is no single, unified, harmonious polity to map a route to flourishing. Individual lives are fragmented into pieces as people move from work environments to home to neighborhoods to places of consumption where they may be anonymous; the virtues for home life may not only be achievable in the absence of the virtues for work life, and so on, but they may actually conflict with each other. The society itself is also fragmented into multiple, sometimes overlapping, sometimes clashing groups; these different “communities of sense” may hold opposing or at least divergent conceptions of what the good life is. Under these conditions, a person’s life cannot be assessed as a whole, and there is no objectively determinable “good life” for a person’s life to be measured against. Given all this, the link between virtue (especially as a unity) and flourishing would be difficult to support.

Instead of trying to resurrect this strong link, contemporary virtue theorists may believe that the most one can demonstrate is a link between some of the virtues and a subjectively determined account of happiness or of a good life. L. W. Sumner (1998), for instance, argues along these lines, first emphasizing a division of the virtues into “self-regarding” virtues (such as prudence), which clearly benefit the agent, and “other-regarding” virtues (generosity, fidelity, etc.), which seem not to.¹² His aim is to find a way of linking the other-regarding virtues to happiness, though by happiness he is concerned only with what he calls the “*prudential value* of a life, namely, how well it is going *for the individual whose life it is*” (21, emphases in original). He creates room for the link by stipulating that “a condition of someone’s life counts as an intrinsic source of well-being for her just in case she authentically endorses it, or finds it satisfying, for its own sake” (30), and by arguing that if one of the other-regarding virtues satisfies this criterion, then it is tied to happiness in more than just an instrumental way. Sumner does have a concern with this account: an evil agent may endorse one of the vices as a source of happiness, and because happiness is for him subjectively determined, it seems one would have to accept that vice as a real path to happiness. However, Sumner dismisses this problem because he is for the most part convinced that the evil agent’s endorsement of a vice would not be *authentic* (and thus the vice would not count as an “intrinsic source of well-being”) because it would either be mis/uninformed about the “facts” of the agent’s own life, or it would be externally manipulated (through indoctrination, etc.), both of which Sumner claims would undermine its

authenticity: “self-assessed happiness counts as well-being only when it is authentic—i.e., both informed and autonomous” (34).

IV

While it is common in contemporary virtue theory to question the connection between virtue and flourishing, I am interested in a more specific version of this questioning since I am concerned with the case of members of privileged groups—who lack moral virtue in ways associated with the exercise of their dominance—and the possibilities for their flourishing. Sumner believes that the vicious will not tend to characterize themselves as morally good and their own lives as good lives or that they will do so only in ways that can be dismissed as based on an inauthentic self-assessment (inauthentic because of a lack of relevant information or a lack of autonomy). However, I believe that the people I am concerned with—those who actively maintain themselves in unjust social locations—will actually have a structurally supported tendency to believe in their own virtue and in the goodness and happiness of their lives, and it will be quite difficult to credibly dismiss these beliefs as inauthentic in the sense that Sumner means.

I have in mind two ways in which the privileged are especially enabled to exhibit character traits that I would describe as clearly vices (injustice, cruelty, lack of compassion, greed, etc.) and yet still lead a/the good life. First of all, they are especially enabled to believe in their own moral goodness no matter what their actual character traits may be, and secondly, they are able to hold a conception of the good life that is consistent with the sort of life they lead, and find widespread intersubjective agreement to confirm their sense of what the good life is.

Believing in one’s own moral goodness (regardless of its absence) is tied to what I think of as a “meta-vice,” namely indifference, or more specifically, indifference to the (preventable) suffering of certain others.¹³ People actively occupying unjust positions of power tend to exhibit selective indifference to suffering—selective because they may be able to feel compassion for certain others, typically others positioned in some ways like themselves.¹⁴ But they cannot allow themselves to be moved by the situations of those whose suffering is tied, directly or indirectly, to the very positions and privileges they actively work to maintain. Being moved in this way would disrupt the sense of themselves as morally good. Thus the husband who does not believe his wife’s “second shift” taking care of the children and the household constitutes an unfair level of extra work must remain indifferent to her exhaustion; the advocates of punitive welfare reform policies must avoid facing the realities of how anguishing it is to have to put one’s child in inadequate care or even leave one’s child dangerously unsupervised while one works a minimum wage job; the rapist may go so far as to think that his victim not only did not suffer from his actions, but even enjoyed herself. Indifference of this sort is a vice that enables other vices, for it permits its bearer to think of him/herself as a good person by masking the effects of his/her unjust, cruel, callous, violent, (and so on) actions. If a remaining link between virtue and well being lies in the fact that thinking of oneself as a morally good person contributes to one’s own happiness, then it will be important for members of privileged groups to be able to sustain an image of themselves as good.

Believing oneself to be living a good life is also—in the absence of the Ancient Greek reliance on an objective account of what the good life is—going to be partly constitutive of actually living a good life. Contemporary virtue theorists tend to accept that the modern conception of happiness is simply subjective and accept a life that is self-assessed as a good life to actually be a good life. I contend that we can still have more than this; we can at least require accounts of happiness or of a good life that are supported by intersubjective agreement within some community of sense. Members of dominant groups easily tend to find this intersubjective agreement, for their communities of sense easily can include only others similar to themselves in the relevant respects. Sumner portrays vicious agents as relying only on their own subjective sense of how good they are and what a good life they are leading—or perhaps finding their subjective sense informed or confirmed by sources that are clearly illegitimate from the point of view of most members of society. However, members of dominant groups find their own conceptions supported by very wide—and powerful, dominant—segments of society. These views cannot be dismissed easily as “inauthentic” (without offering in their place an objective account of the good), though it might be fruitful to try to use—as many feminist theorists have—complicated arguments about epistemic privilege in order to try to show that dominant beliefs are inauthentic in Sumner’s sense: either lacking correct factual information or lacking autonomy from coercively imposed ideologies.¹⁵

The most important feature of the intersubjectively supported account of the good life held by those who actively maintain their unjust privilege is the conviction that the good life for some does not depend on the flourishing of all. Unfortunately, it is false that “no one is free while others are oppressed,” for those who are not oppressed may find their happiness (and their freedom) by simply not noticing the others.

V

Even without fully depending on the concept of epistemic privilege, one can still note that there are certain epistemic requirements for being able to live well despite—or because of—one’s vices. Both being able to think of oneself as morally good, and being able to sustain the intersubjectively confirmed understanding of the good life as one that does *not* depend on the flourishing of all, requires an epistemic isolation; knowledge cannot be gained from outside of the boundaries of groups of people similarly committed to maintaining their privilege.

This claim is consistent with, for instance, Charles Mills’s description in *The Racial Contract* of the epistemological contract that he sees as part of the overall racial contract that the supporters of white supremacy endorse. Those who are “signatories” to the racial contract (and who become its beneficiaries on account of the whiteness that they assign to themselves) must agree to maintain an ignorance about the racial order: “one has to agree to *misinterpret* the world... *on matters related to race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance...*” (1997, 18; emphases in original). Similarly, María Lugones has observed that white feminists often maintain an epistemology of ignorance about their own place in the racial order; specifically, she points out that white feminists

are afraid of knowing the selves that they are in the eyes of women of color, and afraid of identifying with these selves precisely because doing so would undermine their sense of themselves as morally good (1991, 42). The epistemology of ignorance, to use Mills’s phrase, contributes to the well-being of members of privileged groups both because it allows them to believe themselves to be more virtuous than they are (which is important if having an image of oneself as morally good is partly constitutive of happiness), and because it facilitates the illusion that all is well in the world, that the good life can be achieved.

Thus, one can be happy while others suffer, and one can have one’s sense of well-being affirmed by the intersubjective agreement of others like oneself. But this is an agreement that I would argue ought to be refused. What to recommend in its place is harder to say. I would like to suggest the cultivation of a (meta-) virtue that would be the opposite of the (meta-)vice of indifference: a disposition that would leave one sensitive to others’ well-being or lack thereof; I say this with caution, however, for excess in the direction of such sensitivity leaves one in a constant state of anguish. There is such great suffering to face.

Notes

1. Claudia Card (1996) argues that the moral luck arising from conditions of oppression may make certain virtues easier for beneficiaries of oppression—and harder for the oppressed—to develop. For instance, she points out that the virtue of “liberality” is generally not available to those without means to carry it out (4). She also recognizes, though, that privileged people are likely to develop certain vices (53).
2. Much of the virtue ethics literature speaks as if most people are basically virtuous (sometimes the reader is addressed as someone assumed to be virtuous: “*we* do x, the wicked do y”), and the unjust or people with other vices are unusual cases, sometimes bizarre, uncontextualized types such as someone named “Unscrupulous” (Hooker 1996). Within the virtue ethics tradition, an interesting exception to this tendency is Kekes 1998; outside of the virtue ethics tradition, see Shklar 1984 for a discussion of the significance (especially for liberal tolerance) of “ordinary vices.” Given the pervasive injustice of oppression, and given the high level of participation in maintaining structures of oppression, I see unjust and other vicious people as fairly ordinary.
3. See Tessman 2000 and Tessman 2001.
4. For a sustained discussion of moral damage under conditions of oppression, see Card 1996 (especially the first section of chapter three, for a consideration of how women may be morally damaged); I have relied heavily on Card’s work in developing my own analysis of moral damage.
5. For an argument *against* portraying the oppressed as morally damaged, see Walker 1998 (123-125); also see Scott 1997. I extensively consider the question of whether and in what ways it is problematic to associate moral damage with oppression in Tessman (2001).
6. Of course, since it is not *only* or not even *primarily* because of moral deficiencies that one is denied the possibility of flourishing, even from within this virtue ethics framework one could argue that oppression is more damaging to its victims than to its perpetrators. All the way back to Aristotle (with the exception of the Stoics), virtue ethicists recognize that favorable external conditions—such as access to sufficient material goods—are necessary, though not sufficient, for flourishing. (See NE 1099a31-b8 and 1101a14-16). The oppressed are clearly denied favorable external conditions in a way that members of dominant groups are not.
7. See Annas 1998 for an interesting discussion of the relation between virtue and *eudaimonia* and on the differences between the

Ancient Greek conception of *eudaimonia* and the modern conception of happiness.

8. However, Socrates/Plato and Aristotle, in thinking about states of affairs in which “all” are flourishing, fail to really include everyone in their “all”; furthermore, if one conveniently thinks, as Aristotle does, of the “good” for the slave to lie in being ruled by a master, it is easy to think of everyone as living the best possible lives without worrying further about whether the conditions of life under slavery really allow the slave a good life.

9. The key text to see for a full discussion of the differences between the Ancient Greek context and the modern context that are relevant for virtue and flourishing is MacIntyre 1981. MacIntyre also makes important distinctions within an Ancient Greek context, for instance, between a Homeric and an Aristotelian world. Because I am not developing any detailed account of Ancient Greek flourishing here, I am only noting some differences between Ancient Greek and modern/postmodern understandings of the relationship between virtue and happiness.

10. See Aristotle, *NE* Book III, chapter 4, where he notes that some people aim not at the real good, but at an apparent good, usually because they mistakenly confuse the pleasurable and the good.

11. Very clear examples of this are Sumner 1998, which I analyze below, and Hooker 1996. (Hooker distinguishes between asking whether moral virtue is *instrumentally* beneficial to an agent, and whether it is *constitutively* beneficial; nevertheless, he is still concerned with benefits to a self-interested individual.) Also see Driver 1996, Taylor 1996, and (for somewhat of a contrast) Hursthouse 1999 (chapter 8).

12. A somewhat less clearly demarcated division is outlined and problematized by Foot 1978 [1959]. Hooker (1996) relies on the same division as Sumner, stating that “the traditional problem of reconciling virtue with self-interest focuses... on other-regarding virtues,” (142) and further noting that “the potential for conflict between self-regarding virtue and self-interest is fairly slight... The focus on moral virtue leads to a focus on other-regarding virtue, since morality is (at least primarily) concerned with how one treats others” (142f); he overlooks how, for people who are in any relationship to each other, one’s own well-being and that of others is intertwined. I find an emphasis on the distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding virtues to be problematic for any neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, but lack space here to develop the argument. Initially, the division might seem appealing—particularly for my purposes in this paper—because one might be tempted to claim that oppressed people are morally damaged because their opportunities to develop the self-regarding virtues are limited, while privileged people tend to develop the self-regarding virtues well but underdevelop the other-regarding virtues. While this would be a neat solution to the problem I pose in this paper—and while there is truth to the claim that some of the self-regarding virtues (think of confidence, self-esteem, proper pride) are battered under oppression—real life is more complicated than this clean division.

13. For an interesting discussion of indifference (and one that has influenced my thinking here), see Geras 1998.

14. It is in part for this reason that I am reluctant to conclude that the privileged tend not to develop the “other-directed” virtues such as compassion (see footnote 12); they may develop them, but exercise them towards a very limited range of others. See Spelman 1991, who cautions against speaking of a feminist ethic of care, given that many racially and economically privileged women’s caring tends to be limited in extension to others like themselves.

15. For a critique of the use of the concept of epistemic privilege, see Bar On 1993.

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Feminist Awareness as Virtue: A Path of Moderation

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“Doesn’t it make you crazy to be so consistently disappointed?” asked my new partner. We had been watching yet another predictable Hollywood movie and he was showing sympathetic exhaustion at my relentless feminist critiques. And, of course it *does* make me crazy. I wouldn’t be venting my views about the failings of an entire industry so inevitably if it didn’t. But the exchange that followed got me thinking, as exchanges with this man often do. It is a reflex action for me, a habit if you will, to critique my culture from a feminist perspective. I believe this to be a positive and important aspect of my personality. I believe this to be a particularly moral component of my psyche. In this paper, I wish to analyze this character trait, and in so doing make a case for feminist awareness as virtue.

While Aristotle’s ethics opens itself to criticism from several directions, including its blindness to color, class and gender issues, his focus on moral virtues and their development provide a grounding for my view that feminist awareness can and should be an engrained character trait—one which benefits oneself and others, that is, a moral virtue. I suggest that Aristotle’s view of the mean, in particular, can also aid us in understanding this feminist character trait. To think of feminist awareness as producing responses that occupy some middle ground between two extremes helps to determine how best to operate in a world distinctly different from the moral ideal we envision.

Feminist Awareness as Virtue¹

Even though Aristotle would never have seen the capacity for recognizing and responding to inequalities between the genders as being of sufficient interest or usefulness to society to merit its own character trait, much less a virtuous one, his understanding of moral development could hardly be more astute. My interest here is in Aristotle’s explication of *moral* virtue. In general terms, virtues are character traits that benefit oneself and others. To qualify as a moral virtue, (a) an action must be a product of moral deliberation that concludes that (b) the right response to a given circumstance falls within some middle ground between excessive and deficient action. Once the proper action is verified through experience, (c) we must repeat that action regularly enough for it to become a habit. Once it becomes a habit, we have acquired the virtue. A virtuous person will act in virtuous ways, not because they *have* to or because they know they should, but because they *want* to. Their action, then, emanates from a clear understanding of how best to act, and an emotional investment in who one is and wishes to be. I will discuss (a), (b) and (c) above, in turn, as regards feminist awareness, while keeping in mind that being a virtuous person, according to Aristotle, requires a good deal more than the nurturing of a single virtue.²

Practically any activity done repeatedly can find its way into our psyches. For instance, how we tie our shoes, our lovemaking and our responses to injustice, all contain more or less automatic elements, developed over time through repetition. Feminist awareness as virtue specifically involves

the acquisition of the habit of recognizing that males and females tend to be treated differently in this society for morally unjustifiable reasons and that this has a particularly negative effect on women.

Mere recognition of right and wrong will not suffice, however. Virtue will not develop without virtuous action. Becoming aware of gender stereotyping, gaining a consciousness about the barriers created by that stereotyping, and reaching the conclusion that such limitations are morally wrong, will likely, I argue, compel one to work for change, thus engaging one in the performance of virtuous action. If such action does not become habit, no virtue will be forthcoming. Making the awareness of gender inequalities a habit, however, will create the virtue by repeatedly compelling the action.

Moral Deliberation

If one possesses practical wisdom, according to Aristotle, and the proper guidance, a person can learn to desire to act in ways that benefit themselves and their community. I will assume, rather than use space to argue, that the recognition of gender injustice and the accompanying need to act based on that recognition is just such an advantageous virtue. It requires an accumulation of observations, insights, and, likely, some instruction or encouragement. Such experiences must be processed or studied, in order to reach morally valid conclusions about the gender inequities in the world. With practice, such individuals will have the capacity to make decisions based on their best judgment, and will thus create habits which make the best moral virtues.

In my view, education, observation and deliberation together can lead one to develop habits beneficial to living in community with others. This coincides with Aristotle’s view of virtue. I discuss this combination of elements below.

Education: Education may come in many forms: growing up in a feminist household, taking a women’s studies course, picking up a book with a feminist bent, or developing a relationship with a seasoned feminist. These are a few examples of how our community serves to influence us. A Letter to the Editor of *Ms.* magazine illustrates this influence:

I don’t know where I’ve been. It was only when I was looking for a copy of “something new for my clients to read” that I discovered *Ms.* As a 36-year-old hairdresser, I am so tired of looking at fashion magazines filled with emaciated women! Your magazine had stories I loved reading, stories about women who were worth reading about (Brogan 2001, 4).

I suggest that the author of this letter has gained some insight from her recent reading. She is discovering that men’s domination and women’s subordination do not define the necessary state of the world. Her recent reading has taught her that cosmetics and sex tips do not constitute the sum total of worthwhile topics for and about women.

Observation: The letter suggests that this hairdresser has been closely observing the world she lives in prior to finding the magazine. She has been comparing it to the world presented to her in the fashion magazines that fill salons around the country. I suggest that she has noticed a striking incongruity. She describes the women she sees in fashion magazines as “emaciated.” She believes fashion models are

too thin. She wishes to give her clients a different, perhaps more realistic, version of their world. A magazine that talks about all kinds of women making positive, powerful, differences in the world would answer that wish.

Deliberation: She possesses practical wisdom. She has reached the conclusion through her observations that women are being sent a destructive message. Perhaps she has seen such messages played out in the lives of her clients who may suffer from eating disorders or are convinced they will not be loved unless they meet some unattainable physical standard. She has judged the bulk of the writing in “women’s” magazines to be useless, not worth reading. Moral deliberation has delivered her to respond by subscribing to *Ms.* Such responses embody the first steps toward developing the virtue of feminist awareness.

Virtue as Character Trait

As Aristotelian ethics maintains, virtues are not virtues unless they accord with feelings. If I am to be virtuous as regards feminist awareness, I must develop my sense of gender injustice so that it becomes a part of my character; so that my emotions correspond with my rational ability to make decisions and generate action (Aristotle 1963, 308-09). To be virtuous regarding feminist awareness, deliberation must have previously assured me of the moral unacceptability of sexism and oppression. Initial attempts to react well to situations of injustice will have produced satisfaction and knowledge. Convinced that sexism harms, I will learn over time how to temper my response to gender inequities based on my audience, my own needs and the desired effect. In the course of time, this aspect of my character will take on a more and more seasoned and permanent place in my personality. If I practice it consistently, I will be honing my abilities by developing habits I truly value.

Whether I am a stay-at-home mom or an accountant or an astronaut, developing feminist awareness as virtue will require education, observation and deliberation. Such a process can come through many kinds of activities. For example, reading groups, trips to the library, and open discussions with partner and friends, encompass a few of the ways to encourage a consciousness of injustice. Keeping a close eye on my actions and their consequences, examining sources of injustice, and discovering alternative ways of acting, will help to encourage the development of feminist virtue. If repeated year in and year out, such a conscious, active examining will evolve into habit, and, thus, a virtue. I will begin habitually to see the inequities, and I will come to automatically respond in what experience has taught me is the right way. But, like the commitment to quitting smoking or eating healthier, if one is not constantly vigilant, one’s habits will not be formed as one’s deliberation dictates. We must choose to consistently repeat those activities that would create the habits we want.

Aristotle believed the right response to any given situation would be the mean between two extremes. In the next section, I suggest that feminist awareness qualifies in this regard as well.

Virtue as the Middle Ground

The emphasis on virtue as inhabiting the middle ground between excess and deficiency deserves consideration. Almost every time my partner and I sit down to watch a video

or go out to a major Hollywood film, I can expect to have my feminist sensibilities battered a bit. Most films treat women as minor characters, as incidental to the real action of the story, as love interests, as passive plot points, or as mere adornments. In general, I am more likely than not to experience a degree of disappointment with the film industry’s slow progress towards the equitable treatment of women. Films may still be worthy in other ways—as art, as cultural commentary, or as entertainment—and I should have the capacity for appreciating them as such (perhaps a virtue of a related sort). But if I am virtuous as regards feminist awareness, being conscious of gender injustice will translate into some appropriate action, and I argue that that response should demonstrate moderation. If I react excessively to every male dominated film I see, I will wear myself out. I will be burdensome to others. I will be directing my anger at the world in a most ineffectual way. I might alienate my friends, exasperate my partner, and internalize an unproductive bitterness for which I do not have the time or the temperament. Conversely, if I react with a less than moderate response as regards awareness of gender injustice, I will be on the road to passive acceptance of the current state of things, and will be headed toward the loss of the capacity for this sort of moral deliberation. Since virtuous acts need to be repeated until they are habits, if I am not repeating virtuous action, I am not developing virtue. I may even be unlearning that virtue. Further, I will be perpetuating the current environment by not drawing attention to gender injustice, by seemingly demonstrating silent agreement with the status quo.

I believe that Aristotle makes a strong case for the moderate response as the most ethical response, but as he reminds us, the moderate response depends on the person. “The mean [is] relative to us...” (Aristotle 1963, 308). How useful this ultimately makes the concept has been a matter of debate for centuries, but through a few examples I hope to lend some support to the effectiveness of this line of thinking. First of all, according to Aristotle, people who have less restrained temperaments must work hard at controlling their less moderate desires while temperate people find such a task to be quite easy. He suggests, further, that knowledge of one’s strengths and weaknesses will help one gauge the moderate response for a given situation.

For example, if I am a confident, informed, gregarious person with a ready wit, I may have the capacity for dealing with a potentially volatile but isolated case of sexual harassment in a different way than would a more reserved and serious type of person. I might use my charm to diffuse a potentially explosive situation and make a delightfully persuasive point without attacking anyone. A more reserved, serious person trying the same approach would likely come off sounding wooden or false. The less extroverted but equally confident person might, instead, produce a clear and convincing set of arguments that explain why particular actions create problems in the workplace, again without being directly accusative. However, someone new to the world of feminist awareness, someone without many survival skills, someone more vulnerable than the people in my first two examples, may need very responsibly to obtain the support of her institution’s complaint process or choose the legal route. In our pursuit of virtue, we need to develop the ability to assess situations with a clear understanding of our own

talents and limitations. Invoking the right response depends on knowing our strengths and weaknesses, as well as being attuned to the nature of each situation.

Some will argue (bell hooks, for instance) that a moderate response may not send the message home, that anger at injustice should not be squelched (hooks 1989, 129).³ Some will argue that diplomacy will look too much like acquiescence, that if a good deal of forcefulness does not accompany the message that the message will be dismissed. I believe my view is not at odds with this perspective. In Aristotle, and throughout the history of moral philosophy, it has been acknowledged that morality cannot be known with certainty. Deliberation about our actions is required, but only experience will confirm or deny that our responses were adequate. Part of the deliberation required for the development of feminist awareness as virtue involves perceptiveness regarding one's audience. If I am downing a couple of ales and playing pool in a working-class bar with folks I know to be unaware of feminist issues in any reflective way, I will respond differently than I would if surrounded by academic colleagues dismissive of issues of gender injustice who should know better. If I have been playing pool in a neighborhood bar with someone who tells me I play "pretty good pool for a girl," I am likely to control any cutting remark itching to come off my lips. I might rather, in the course of the evening, look for some gentle, good-humored feminist suggestion with which my comrade would be hard pressed to disagree. Maybe we will compare years of pool experience or "training" grounds to see what differences suggest themselves along unjustifiably gendered lines. Perhaps there will be a chance for me to point out some gender inequities of other kinds without being preachy. Or, perhaps, this time, I will just let it go, playing a few more games in relative silence to emphasize my abilities. It will depend on my pool opponent and how I read the moment.

If I am interacting with colleagues with as much or more academic experience as I, I will not be looking for subtle approaches. If a colleague told me, for instance, that I have an amazingly good understanding of Kant for a female, I would be much quicker to respond.⁴ Someone who has been to graduate school within the last 20 years or has been in academia long enough to have been exposed to important changes regarding gender relations has at least been notified of the guidelines necessary to avoid sex discrimination suits. Academics in this sense *should* know better. Therefore, the more exquisitely patient and tactful approach demonstrated in my pool hall example would not be appropriate. Such a response would be deficient because it would be masking the indignation I would experience at not being respectfully treated by a colleague. The comment regarding my understanding of Kant appears to be intentionally sexist—at the very least, careless—and such comment deserves a response that directly addresses that negligence.

If I am in the midst of people accustomed to communicating at a level of emotional intensity foreign to the mass of white middle-class America (of which I am one), I would want to raise or lower my own intensity to match theirs, in order to best communicate. This suggests that I would need to be sensitive enough to the people with whom I am interacting to intuit how best they communicate.

Many versions of care ethics emphasize the need for such perceptiveness. Attending to that conversation can help to

nurture the development of feminist awareness as virtue. Nel Noddings, for instance, discusses the caring relationship in terms of "relatedness" and "engrossment." She argues that we have to hone our capacity for perceptiveness in order to care for others ethically (Noddings 1984, 30-37).⁵ For María C. Lugones: "To know one's self and one's situation is to know one's company" (Lugones 1991, 35-36). Lugones argues that our relationships contribute to who we are. As a white person, coming to understand specific experiences of other ethnic groups will give me better tools for communicating, for finding the right response. The better I know myself and my circumstances, the better I know those in my community.

If I am a woman just coming to an understanding of grave injustices she has suffered, who has been trained to suffer in silence since before she could speak, my mode of communication may well be outside some norm of moderation. Feminist awareness would ensure my anger would be palpable and my "mean" would very likely be extreme, compared to others. But that anger would still have to be controlled for me to be virtuous. I would be angry for the right reasons, at the right people, and in an amount that I had assessed as the right amount. My response should still be within the mean, relative to me. It could not be deficient, some stony sullen silence which could be misinterpreted or written off. And it could not be the other extreme. Excess in such a case would border on the out-of-control, on the unreasonable, and thus the incommunicable. If my rage reached beyond a sensible decibel level, if it became incoherent, if it were too often veiled in tears that silenced the words, its source would not be communicable. My moderate response should make clear to a thinking adult that harm has been done. To be virtuous as regards feminist awareness, I must have the capacity to articulate how I have been harmed.

The notion of moderation that I am suggesting can be imagined as operating on a kind of sliding scale depending on the individual and the circumstance. The development of feminist virtue entails evolution — Aristotle says a lifetime of training. The subtleties of assessing one's audience and one's own needs and developing the corresponding habits will come with time if one stays alert to the inequalities of the world and the duties to one's self and those to whom one is relating.

Feminist Awareness as Process

I have argued that feminist awareness can be viewed as a virtue. What I have said so far implies that we can know the right response for every situation, given enough deliberation and experience. Sandra Bartky speaks to this point with her notion of "double ontological shock" (Bartky 1990, 18). For Bartky, upon reaching feminist awareness, we experience the shock that comes with understanding that the world is not the way we thought it was. But, in addition, we have the shock of ambiguity, of realizing we are not guaranteed to be right regarding our new interpretation. Bartky speaks of the potential for paranoia, suspicion and self-doubt (Bartky 1990, 18). My own experience supports Bartky's view. When I have to double-check the name tag on the man in front of me to assure myself that he is the nurse sent to summon me to my cousin's bedside; when I do not call the male student on his inappropriate eye contact; when the 11-year-old girl from next door comes to help me move and at her mother's

encouragement I relegate her to sweeping while boys carry boxes; in these and many other circumstances I am not exerting the same feminist virtue I have been extolling in this essay.

Yet, I believe that feminist awareness involves a process. That it may never be a completed process fits closely with what the development of virtue requires. Bartky writes that, as feminists, we have no “fully formed moral paradigms” (Bartky 1990, 20-21). Much of what we do as feminists gets made up as we go along. Still, the more experience we have making “it” up and observing its effects, the wiser and more confident we will become. The more practice we get deliberating about our world and acting in it, the closer we will be to shaping habits worthy of moral virtue. Despite the ambiguity that Bartky insists comes with feminist consciousness, we have the capacity to cultivate our practical wisdom. We have the capacity to develop feminist awareness as virtue.

Notes

1. While I discuss the virtue of being aware of *gender* inequities in this paper, the ideas put forth here could as easily apply to awareness of racial and other injustice.
2. A virtuous person is one who has trained and nurtured a number of virtues into a well-balanced, harmonious character, over a lifetime. Feminist awareness is by no means the only virtue that should be cultivated.
3. In *Talking Back*, for instance, hooks speaks of confrontation as being the necessary mode of communication for many (see especially pp.129-133).
4. This specific scenario has in fact never occurred in my academic career.
5. While I do not agree with this particular approach to care ethics as a whole, I find Noddings’s understanding of the need to discover the viewpoint of the other as particularly important in the development of moral character.

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Feminist Ethics and Anger: A Feminist Buddhist Reflection¹

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Feminist care ethics began with the thesis that there is a distinctive feminist moral experience (Jaggar 1991, 81). According to Elizabeth Spelman, the ethics of care involves the claim that emotions play a central role in human life and in moral sensibility (Spelman 1991, 216). It aims to overcome dualisms and to bring balance to the relation of reason/emotion, heart/mind and to reduce the control of reason over emotion in moral experience and agency. The feminist ethic of care has been a powerful challenge to and antidote to many traditional masculinist theories that, it is argued, place too much emphasis upon universal justice principles, rights claims and the role of reason. Since feminist care ethics aims to revalorize the role of the emotions in moral experience, there have been notable defenses of the role of anger in fighting oppression and promoting healing and self-recovery.² This raises the issue of anger’s potential as natural, creative energy. Some feminist accounts of anger do not, then, see anger as always being a vice and sometimes view it as a necessary evil, that is, as morally justified under certain conditions. Some see it as a virtue in some contexts.³

Recently, feminist Buddhist writers have also sought to revision anger’s place in feminist thought and in Buddhist philosophy and meditation practice. An examination of the contribution of this perspective promises to enrich and deepen understanding of feminist care ethics and of feminist virtue theory, in particular. In the context of feminist virtue theory, Buddhist feminists advance arguments that maintain that in some circumstances anger has the potential to do good, by promoting spiritual and emotional healing and awareness, as well as by challenging patriarchy. Thus anger can be virtuous if rooted in compassion and wisdom.

Rita Gross, in *Buddhism After Patriarchy* (1993), has led the way in the feminist reconstruction of Buddhism in its movement into the West. The foundational teaching and philosophy of Buddhism and its basic meditative techniques begin with the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths explore the nature and causes of human suffering or dissatisfaction (*‘dukkha’* in Pali or Sanskrit), as well as the end of and liberation from suffering. The cause of *dukkha* or dissatisfaction is attachment, craving, or holding on to the objects and experiences we desire. The end of suffering or liberation from suffering is nirvana. Lama Surya Das explains that “nirvana is inconceivable inner peace, the cessation of craving and clinging” (Das 1997, 84). It is nonattachment, release, openness, and emptiness. Nirvana can be experienced in a moment simply by letting go of craving, clinging, attachment and delusion (Das 1997, 85). The positive program provides methods for self-development. Basic Buddhist meditation techniques emphasize that

to dismantle ego and undercut its pain-producing tendencies, ongoing disciplines of meditation and contemplation are essential. In the simple and basic practices of mindfulness and awareness, one is taught how to experience thoughts without repressing them, judging them, or acting them out. One is taught to observe and notice, to increase

awareness, to become much more familiar with one's thought patterns and habitual tendencies without immediately trying to fix them or change them (Gross 1993, 170).

Gross argues that these meditative techniques are healing tools that can lead to self-recovery and self-esteem. Patriarchy induces self-hatred in women and undermines their sense of self. This claim fits within the general claim of the politics of recognition that members of oppressed groups suffer damage and distortion of sense of self due to the misrecognition of others (Taylor 1994, 25). Gross argues that the mindfulness-awareness techniques for developing self-acceptance give practitioners the courage to struggle against patriarchy.

Gross wonders why Buddhists often fail to acknowledge the source of women's anger. Just as those feminist philosophers working with Western philosophical theories have had to confront and critique the historical treatment of women in this tradition, so Buddhist feminist theorists have had to come to terms with and critique the historical treatment of women in historical Buddhist thought (Gross 1998, 8). She says that Buddhist teachings underscore that aggression results from pain. These teachings usually lead to insight and understanding concerning the source of someone's aggression as well as insight into the critical intelligence that is within aggression. But Gross points out that despite these teachings, Buddhist feminists are often treated aggressively and their insights dismissed (Gross 1998,10).

Gross goes on to explore the unexpected results of her practice. Like many other feminist academics responding to the obstacles and oppression in her environment, she had sought protective strategies, including anger, in order to cope.

In Buddhist terms, I had created an ego out of feminist anger, and I wanted to protect it. I had no idea that seriously practicing basic mindfulness-awareness practices would challenge that ego. It was somewhat disorienting when that solid ego began to dissolve a bit, when I found anger less personally satisfying than I had previously... The cloudy, murky emotion of anger was beginning to transmute (Gross 1993,171).

According to her analysis of the effects of her Buddhist practice, anger was transmuting into wisdom. She felt that this transformation was beneficial in helping her to continue to speak with strong conviction, but more clearly and gently. She says that she felt more effective in expressing her feminist principles than when she expressed herself angrily (Gross 1993,171). A mutual transformation of both her Buddhism and her feminism was occurring. But notably for this discussion, Gross equates anger with aggression. And in equating anger and aggression, she claims that "aggressive speech and actions always produce negative counterreactions" (Gross 1993,11).

Although Gross has opened up new pathways in understanding feminist and engaged Buddhism, other feminist Buddhists go further, and question whether this analysis still maintains a tendency to pull back from the full energy and potential of wrathful anger. Other feminist Buddhists present a more fine-grained analysis of anger. For example, bell hooks argues for more subtle conclusions about the multi-faceted effects of anger.

Anita Barrows questions whether this view of anger goes far enough in the revisioning and reconstruction of engaged Buddhism, which includes Buddhist feminism. The mindfulness-awareness meditation process, if not informed and enlarged by feminist insight, runs the risk of encouraging disempowerment and of stifling feeling (Barrows 1996, 51). Women who have been abused and disempowered must find skillful means to express and deal with anger. One such means is the strategy of relating their experiences of violation of their persons to the violation of the earth (Barrows 1996, 51). When emotions of anger are welcomed rather than disavowed, then what often follow are experiences of other feelings like fear, despair, grief, and then a process of action or reconstruction. Barrows calls such anger which "so breaks open the heart 'holy anger'" (Barrows 1996, 51). It is in the same category as the wrath of Buddhism which is aroused by and incited by compassion, and which has great potential for change and transformation (Goleman 1997, 173). Viewed in this light, holy anger is "a searing flame, an energy which can cut through layers of deception and conditioning" (Barrows 1996, 52). Mindfulness and meditation can bring the awareness to observe the experience of anger without the reactivity; practitioners learn to observe and have the space to learn how to relate to its energy, and to react or not react, and to react creatively and constructively. Anger is of course often destructive, but can also be extremely creative. Barrows argues that our culture conflates and confuses anger with violence and aggression. From this perspective, it appears that Gross has taken over uncritically this conflation of anger and aggression, rather than taking the opportunity to revision the role and possibilities of anger in countering oppression. This social conditioning leads us into reactivity and "to expect little to intervene between our experience of anger...and the impulse to act on it hurtfully" (Barrows 1996, 53). So it is important to distinguish anger as violence or aggression from wrath or holy anger. In the context of feminist virtue theory, the first form of anger, that of violence, is a vice, while the second form, that of holy anger, is a virtue.

Barrows pursues this point by setting out some of the connotations of anger, which may bring light and insight.⁴ Rage can conjure up and be associated with lack of control. "But rage can also be the power of a storm, sheer elemental force. Rage in the sense of outcry...How can we reach acceptance without first going through rage?" (Barrows 1996, 53). In moving from rage to outrage, we move into resistance to injustice. Thus tree-huggers resist the loggers with outrage: "the conjunction of rage and eros, where what informs rage is love and the absolute determination that what one loves shall be preserved" (Barrows 1996, 54). Meditation practice can be used to honor anger, to renew its vitality and unhook it from violence. Such compassionate anger would stand firm and resist, but "its aim would not be vengeance...the suffering of the offender...its aim would not be to continue the cycle of suffering, but rather to interrupt it and establish something new in its stead" (Barrows 1996, 54). It would not be aggressive, or aim to dominate another.

While Barrows agrees with the importance of bringing awareness to anger, to prevent it from turning into violence, she is wary of the sort of transmuting process accepted by Gross. Barrows says that "if we leap too quickly into forgiveness and lovingkindness, don't we risk losing an opportunity to correct the imbalance, the injustice...If we

drain the energy from anger by neutralizing it too fast, don't we risk compromising our own vitality in ways which are only too familiar?" (Barrows 1996, 55). In our culture, women too readily see transformation as neutralization and too readily view anger as being too intense. She concludes:

If we can learn to be present to our anger, to know it and feel it, I think we will begin to see ways in which it can open the heart rather than closing it. I think we will see the pathways of change it reveals to us, the ways in which anger is genuinely inextricable from love (Barrows 1996, 56).

Bell hooks also illustrates and gives room for reflection upon the limitations of Gross's account of anger. Hooks argues that competitive, brutal and aggressive behavior in feminist movements must be replaced by caring and constructive disagreement and communication. She illustrates the difficulties that are involved in figuring out and distinguishing between the positive mode of anger as wrath and the negative mode of anger as violence.

She claims that it is important that women learn how to engage in face-to-face struggle to reach a place of understanding that has acknowledged and let go of hostility (hooks 2000, 66). She describes occasions on which she has given talks that made some members of the audience angry and resulted in what certainly seemed to be hostility and confrontational speech. The confrontation and angry speech seemed to be negative and unproductive at the time, and yet greater clarity and insight and change were often the result (hooks 2000, 66). How is one to assess the effects of anger and confrontation? Bell hooks concludes that "if women always seek to avoid confrontation, to always be 'safe,' we may never experience any revolutionary change, any transformation, individually or collectively" (hooks 2000, 66-67).

From the perspective of some Buddhist teachings, there is a deeper problem with the approach that always evaluates anger negatively: this can undermine compassion. Compassion arises from a process that involves seeing your own limitations. You practice mindfulness, and wish to be kind and gentle, and find that you are not. "You try to be peaceful and never raise your voice and you find out that you have a lot of rage. The Dharma is about making friends with the groundlessness and discomfort of those feelings. It is not about making rules so that those emotions never arise. Compassion doesn't come from trying to clean up the whole act" (Chodron 1996, 300).

These comments give pause and allow room for reflection upon Gross's interpretation of anger as something that always produces negative responses. For in hooks's example, the negative responses are certainly present. But insight, clarity, growth, and change are also present. The two sorts of effect are so intermingled that there is much space for different interpretations about the overall impact and effect.

In a more recent article, hooks provides further reflections on the impact of anger and its relation to love and contemplation. Although hooks is well-known for her arguments that feminist work needs to be rooted in an understanding of gender, race, and class, in this recent article she says that "asked to define myself, I wouldn't start with race...I wouldn't start with gender...I would start by stripping

down to what fundamentally informs my life...I stand spiritually, steadfastly, on a path of love—that's the ground of my being" (hooks 1996, 287). Because so much feminist work calls for the dissolving of dualisms, hooks was attracted by the fundamental tenet of Buddhism to move beyond dualisms through love as a spiritual practice. Engaged Buddhism uses love as the foundation for a practice of action in the world. From the anguish of the suffering in the world from war, genocide, and oppression, the practice of love integrates contemplation and activism. Wisdom is the guide for the practitioner to know when stillness and contemplation are needed as well as when engagement, activism and even confrontation are called for. The culture of domination perpetuates a deep sense of unworthiness—the same sort of unworthiness noted by Gross and others. This culture of domination says that everything of value is outside of you and must be seen as something to be acquired in order to be consumed; nothing inside is of value. This message devalues human beings and puts values on things to be acquired. "Low self-esteem is a national epidemic and victimization is the flip side of domination. While revolution must begin with the self, the inner work must be united with a broader social vision" (hooks 1996, 291).⁵ We cannot have change without contemplation. "Militant resistance cannot be effective if we do not first enter silence and contemplation to discover—to have a vision—of right action. The point is not to give up rage, rather that we use it to deepen the contemplation to illuminate compassion and struggle" (hooks 1996, 292). Seen in this light, anger can be empowered by compassion, contemplation and love to challenge and alleviate the suffering of patriarchy.

Notes

1. I would like to express my thanks to Andrea Nicki for comments on a draft of this paper.
2. See Marilyn Frye (1983) as well as Lynne McFall (1991).
3. See Andrea Nicki (2001, 1998) and Wendy Donner (1997).
4. "That light of outrage is the light of history springing upon us when we're least prepared," Adrienne Rich (quoted in Barrows [1996, 51]).
5. See also bell hooks (2000).

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Envy, Self-Protection and Moral Progression

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Moral accounts of envy usually present this emotion as wholly negative. For instance, Robert Solomon claims that envy is "an essentially vicious emotion, bitter and vindictive" (Solomon 1993, 248). Whereas, he maintains, anger can be good, in the form of moral self-righteousness, leading to positive, productive behaviour that challenges unfairness (Solomon 1993, 227), envy is completely lacking in moral support and incapable of affording any benefit. Anger unites effectively with compassion, but envy is paralyzing and self-consuming: a "loser's emotion" (Solomon 2001, 10). Similarly, Don Herzog refers to the Western literary tradition of depicting envy as resulting in bodily emaciation and an anemic complexion (Herzog 2001, 144-145). Most often, envy is judged to fester like an unattended wound, draining the envious of vitality, its intense competitiveness turning against itself. In this essay, I will challenge the view of envy as necessarily diminishing and indicative of moral failure. I will show that envy can be particularly helpful and vital for oppressed people when faced with challenging situations that threaten their sense of themselves as free moral agents, who are not rendered defeatist and helpless by an awareness of social evils. Focussing on Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* (1985), I will explore the role that envy plays or fails to play in the lives of the central characters, who suffer from sexual, racial and class oppression, and uncover the resulting impact on their well-being. Finally, I will outline a model of moral progression that recognizes the creative potential of envy and other traditional moral vices.

Envy and Self-Protection

In Morrison's novel, the protagonist Claudia and her sister Frieda are poor, black girls who are envious of their rich, white classmate Maureen Peal. They notice the special attention and admiration that she receives because of her expensive clothes, white skin, and green eyes, which make her into everyone's "dream child" (Morrison 1985, 2100). Teachers are always encouraging toward her; other students never harass her; and everybody wants to be her friend. Claudia and Frieda feel threatened in their sense of self-worth because of this unequal treatment, as Claudia narrates: "If she was cute—and if anything could be believed, she *was*—then we were not. And what did that mean? We were lesser. ...Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins...and could not comprehend this unworthiness. Jealousy we understood and thought natural—a desire to have what somebody else had; but envy was a strange, new feeling for us" (Morrison 1985, 2108).

Solomon maintains that in envy, unlike in jealousy, one does not perceive oneself as equal to the other and may admit that the other deserves the goods that one lacks (1993, 248). However, contrary to Solomon, if one actually does deserve what the other has, envy would seem an appropriate response. Envy's element of competitiveness would seem to afford self-protection. To "restore [their] equilibrium," to guard against a flooding sense of unworthiness, Claudia and Frieda bitterly and viciously search for flaws in Maureen (Morrison 1985, 2101). When they find out she has a "dogtooth" and was born with six fingers they call her hatefully behind her back "Six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie" (Morrison 1985, 2101). At the end of a heated confrontation between Maureen and the gang of Claudia, Frieda, and their playmate Pecola, Maureen, just before departing, shouts at the others: "black and ugly" (Morrison 1985, 2107). Claudia states: "The weight of her remark stunned us, and it was a second or two before Frieda and I collected ourselves enough to shout, 'Six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie!' We chanted this most powerful of our arsenal of insults as long as we could see [her]" (Morrison 1985, 2107). With their envy aroused, expressed in vindictive chanting, they succeed in defending their self-esteem against Maureen's attacks. Thus, their envy has a positive function, enabling them to preserve a certain level of self-respect.

Notably, Gabriele Taylor explores how envy is a self-protective emotion but maintains that the kind of self it protects is a deficient one (1988, 243). She writes:

[Envy] is experienced as frustration at not having what she thinks she needs, with consequent anger and resentment directed against the other. ...[T]he good (or kind of good) is thought to be needed not necessarily for its own sake, it is needed primarily to secure or boost the person's self-esteem. ...The self to be protected is, in the person's own view, a defective self. What it lacks may be something she believes to be itself a requisite for being of worth: money, a certain social position, beauty, personal relationships, etc. Or it may be something which she thinks is needed to give her value in the eyes of others. ...Either way, her thoughts and desires when feeling envy are misdirected: her self-esteem is insecure because she thinks of herself as lacking that

which would enable her to think well of herself (1988, 243).

Taylor attributes envy to a defect within the person experiencing it; envy serves to ward off a revelation of one's shortcomings and the unpleasant feelings that would attend it (1988, 243). She seems to assume that self-esteem is not at all dependent for its strength on external, social goods like money or social status but is wholly determined by inner, private judgment, by thinking "of [oneself] as lacking" or not lacking (Taylor 1988, 243).

However, it is difficult for a person to think well of herself if she lacks "money, a certain social position, beauty, personal relationships" (Taylor 1988, 243) because in a sexist, racist, classist society respect for people tends to be reduced to respect for people as possessors of socially valued characteristics. Without these valued aspects, the appreciation of others will not likely be forthcoming. If someone is poor others might see her as lazy and if she lacks nurturing personal relationships she may have no one to help convince her otherwise. Far from being "misdirected" (Taylor 1988, 243), her envy may be in a certain sense well-targeted.

Consider again Claudia's and Frieda's envy of Maureen. Their stance toward Maureen is defensive. However, this is not so much because they fear their shortcomings will be revealed to themselves—that a defective self will be exposed—but to protect a self that sees itself as essentially equal to the other. Because Claudia and Frieda judge, in challenge to the sexist, racist, classist values of the dominant culture, that they are essentially equal to Maureen, they are envious of her and see themselves as just as deserving of the positive regard that Maureen receives.¹ Their hostility focuses on Maureen's *unjustified* sense of superiority. Claudia states: "When I thought of the *unearned* haughtiness in her eyes, I plotted accidental slammings of locker doors on her hands" (Morrison 1985, 2101, my emphasis). It is not so much that Claudia and Frieda, in their envy, believe that they deserve Maureen's expensive clothes, white skin and green eyes, which bring her such appreciation, but rather that they think it is unfair that these aspects of Maureen should bring her greater appreciation. They are envious of Maureen's "cuteness" derived from prejudiced standards of judgment and jealous of the greater attention it affords her. In chanting their degrading nickname at Maureen, they are, in effect, proclaiming their right to be "cute."

Further, Taylor writes: "[By] directing her thoughts toward the other's possession of the good and away from her own defect she can disguise from herself what is crucially wrong and save herself from hostility which is self-directed" (1988, 243). But firstly, there is nothing wrong with Claudia and her sister guarding themselves against feelings of shame and humiliation (of not being "comfortable in [their] skins" (Morrison 1985, 2108)) which would inevitably be produced if they saw themselves as essentially inferior to Maureen and not worthy of equal consideration. Secondly, admittedly on one level their hostility toward Maureen is misdirected and self-deceptive, as Claudia claims: "And all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The Thing to fear was the Thing that made her beautiful, and not us" (Morrison 1985, 2108). Perfectly targeted hostility would be directed at a society that promotes racist beauty ideals and constructs girls and women as sex objects competing for beauty. In this sense, Taylor is correct

to claim that envy cannot change what is basically wrong with a person's situation (1988, 243). Envy protects Claudia and her sister against self-hatred but also from a hatred that might be overwhelming because of the sense of powerlessness it could provoke before an all-arching system of oppression.

Self-Deception and Magic

Taylor does consider that there may be some cases of envy that should not be judged irrational, as when great inequalities in the distribution of primary goods cause a loss of self-esteem in those at the losing end (Taylor 1988, 248). But she emphasizes that although in such cases the beliefs informing envy may be fully justified and rational, "envy consists not merely in holding such beliefs. At the time of experiencing emotional envy the other-directed hostile feelings will still be self-protective, and so self-deceptive and self-defeating. While in the throes of the emotion the person concerned still wants to change the situation by magic" (Taylor 1988, 248). Thus for Taylor cases of justified envy can nonetheless be seen as informed by delusion. However, notably, Claudia and Frieda, who, I have been arguing, experience justified envy, never engage in any self-deceptive behavior that would suggest that they would like to transform their situation by magic (even the chanting of their nickname for Maureen).

In contrast, consider their playmate Pecola who does seek to change her situation by magic and who does not experience any envy. Pecola suffers the opposite fate of Maureen. She is abused by her family, teachers and classmates and believes it is because of her physical appearance, perceiving herself as ugly. She seeks out the "spiritual counsellor" Soaphead and requests that he grant her blue eyes. On Pecola's view if she had blue eyes, she would stop being mistreated and have the love reserved for all the "Shirley Temples of the world" (Morrison 1985, 2076). One could view the emotion expressed here as envy in the form of a desire to emulate rather than grandiose admiration. But, as I have been arguing, envy arises from or requires self-love. In the angry confrontation mentioned earlier between the three black girls and Maureen, Pecola responds toward Maureen's taunts with an attitude of self-hatred and despair. Claudia states: "Pecola stood a little apart from us, her eyes hinged in the direction in which Maureen had fled. ...She seemed to fold into herself, like a pleated wing. Her pain antagonized me. ...She held it in where it could lap up into her eyes" (Morrison 1985, 2107).

While the understandable kind of envy that Claudia and her sister experience contains an element of self-deception in targeting Maureen instead of oppressive societal values and structures, it is not self-defeating. It protects their sense of self-worth and a conception of themselves as moral agents who have some control over their fates, who can make meaningful choices despite constraints. It is, tragically, Pecola's extreme admiration of "white beauty" that is self-defeating. Convinced that "only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty" (Morrison 1985, 2092). Pecola's father rapes her and she becomes pregnant. Lacking all emotional tools for self-protection, she falls deeper into despair, still clinging to an obsession with "white beauty" which hastens her destruction: "She flailed her arms like a bird in an eternal, grotesquely futile effort to fly. Beating the air, a winged but grounded bird, intent on the blue void it could not reach—could not even see—but which filled the valleys of the mind" (Morrison 1985, 2182).

Conclusion: Moral Progression and “Vices”

Envy, in reinforcing Claudia’s and Frieda’s sense of moral agency, serves to maintain a moral foundation from which they can develop morally. As Iris Murdoch maintains, morality is intimately connected with progress (1980). However, whereas on her view, progress is achieved by a turning away from the “selfish” concerns of the ego, the account I have been defending does not insist on an orientation away from the “selfish” ego. Pecola’s other-regarding orientation—her intense admiration of blond, blue-eyed girls—is noticeably a hindrance in terms of her moral development, since it is fed by self-hatred. For a severely oppressed and abused person, like Pecola, moral progress may take the form first of despair, where she experiences a great sense of hopelessness and disorientation, having no sense of herself as a being with a personal domain worthy of respect; then envy, resentment and anger, where she feels a claim to such a domain, though without much security, since the goods she feels she deserves are not forthcoming and her desire receives no external validation;² then indignation where she sees herself as a survivor of injustices; and finally expansive compassionate love where she can see the Maureen Peals of the world not as the enemy, instead focussing hostility toward oppressive values, ideals and structures. A previously despairing person achieving these passions can emerge as a real hero, as an activist survivor of serious injustices magnificent in all her realized “vices” and “virtues” like badges of achievement.³

Admittedly, “vices,” such as envy, are not like the “virtues” of compassion and love that one should be striving to maintain for their own sake. However, a state of more widely encompassing compassion and love is not necessarily reached by a greater exercise of unalloyed “virtues,” completely separate from “vices.” On Murdoch’s account, the path to moral perfection is straightforward and linear; one moves straight up it simply with just and loving vision (1980, 91); moral behaviour takes one onto higher and higher rungs of moral achievement. In contrast, on my account, this path may involve dips, turns and chasms that one may have to pass through in order to attain a state of more expansive love. And while travelling down a mountain in one’s quest for the top (perhaps going through the wrath of anger⁴) may seem to indicate failure or disorientation, one may, because of various social injustices that severely constrict one’s movement, have no other way to keep on the path. In the case of Claudia and Frieda, their envy of Maureen, in protecting their love for themselves as unvalued black girls, bonds them together in mutual appreciation. Their envy is informed by a loving attitude toward self and each other, which facilitates their moral growth. In the case of Pecola, with her severely abusive family and intense self-hatred, the transformative function that certain “vices” could have served in her life seem undeniable. I am asserting a psychological argument based on psychological assumptions about the relationship between attitudes toward self and emotional and moral capacities which cannot be fully argued for here. But to insist that envy could not be morally valuable in Pecola’s life because it is not a “virtue” simply begs the question for what emotions can count as morally good.

Notes

1. As Aristotle suggests, envy is typically felt toward those who are “like” or “equal” to us (1926, 1386b, 35). Also, as Hume maintains, one must judge the other to be in important respects like or equal to

oneself in order to experience envy toward her: “A poet is not apt to envy a philosopher, or a poet of a different kind” (Hume 1963, 426).

2. Notably, Pecola does experience anger at times but she is unable to sustain it: “Anger stirs and wakes in her; it opens its mouth, and like a hot-mouthed puppy, laps up the dregges of her shame. Anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. ... It is a lovely surging. ... The anger will not hold; the puppy is too easily surfeited. ... The shame wells up again” (Morrison 1985, 2094). My discussion here is guided by Frye (1985) who argues that anger implies a claim to a domain worthy of respect (87).

3. As Solomon acknowledges, sometimes “virtues” may not reinforce each other, but instead combine effectively with “vices”: “When anger, envy, and justice join forces, watch out!” (2001, 7).

4. See Wendy Donner, *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy*, this issue.

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Semper Fidelis? Some Observations on Adultery

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Fidelity is normally thought to be a virtue, depending of course on the worth of that to which one is faithful. The corresponding vice, then, is infidelity. In what follows, I make some observations on marital infidelity, that is, adultery.

Why is it commonly thought that adultery is immoral? In his classic paper, Richard Wasserstrom answers the question in these ways: first, the marital partners have promised each other fidelity and so the immorality in this case lies in breaking a promise (1984, 94-95). But, one might ask, given the current statistics on marital infidelity,¹ is it reasonable to make such a promise oneself? Is it reasonable to extract such a promise from another person? Imagine a couple who marry in their twenties and live ‘til well into their seventies. Is it reasonable to expect that neither will have sex with another partner for fifty years—half a century? And can strict marital fidelity—fifty years of it—be enforced at all except by a hypervigilant and punitive conscience? And who would want such a conscience, an internalized cop who keeps us always under surveillance? Since conscience sometimes falls asleep, marital fidelity has traditionally been enforced by a closely

knit, normally religious and highly sexually repressive community that keeps its members under strict surveillance (the world of my grandparents). Religion alone, without the community I have described, as we know from the stories of Jim Baker and Jimmy Swaggart, is no guarantee against adultery.

Second, Wasserstrom thinks that adultery typically involves deceit and lying on the part of the adulterous partner; all other things being equal, lying and deceiving those close to us seems to be paradigmatically immoral. Since in our culture, sexual acts are associated with the expression of love, the partner who assures his wife he still loves her while sleeping with another will be seen to be practicing a particularly pernicious form of deceit, lying not only about his actions but about his feelings.

What exactly is infidelity, also called “cheating,” also called “betrayal?” Consider the following two cases:

Case 1. A woman confides her husband’s secrets, let us say, that have to do with his personal habits, to her circle of acquaintance which is also his circle of acquaintance. These confidences would be highly embarrassing to the husband if he knew that others knew them; indeed, unbeknownst to him, their disclosure has tended to lower him in the estimation of his friends.

Case 2. A married professional woman goes alone to a convention and sees a man she was greatly drawn to, but never dated, in graduate school. They embrace warmly. At the evening reception he confides that he was greatly drawn to her too but never acted on his attraction. They drink too much as people are wont to do on such occasions and end up in bed. Sober the next morning, she has no desire to repeat this amorous interlude with her old buddy.

Now in Case 2, most people would say that the wife has “cheated” on her husband. But would we say of the reprehensible wife in Case 1 that she has been unfaithful to her husband, that she has “cheated” on him? I think not. Does the difference in language perhaps reveal something important about the way we think about trust in marriage? Does it say something about the overestimation of sex and sexual fidelity? I will return to this later.

Now consider two more cases.

Case 3. Cindy, a married woman in her mid-thirties, spends virtually every evening at her computer. She surfs what she has found to be sexually oriented chat rooms on the Internet. In these chat rooms, she finds new or sometimes familiar partners with whom she shares her sexual fantasies. The men’s fantasies (if men they are; one never knows on the Internet) are compatible with hers or they would be elsewhere in another chat room. These one-on-one sexy conversations in cyberspace begin to excite both partners. The language on the screen creates so much heat that Cindy, or her partner, or both are brought to orgasm. Sometimes when this does not happen or is happening too slowly, the screen is exchanged for the telephone and the exciting recital of what he would like to do with her or she with him has a voice: the screen has become a person—a

cyberperson? The recital of what each would like to do with the other leaves the subjunctive and becomes a recital of what each is doing to the other. The process is brought to an end when Cindy has her orgasm which she has almost every time she does this, which is almost every evening. I didn’t ask her, but I imagine that Cindy uses her vocal and ideational bag of tricks to insure that her partner has his orgasm, too. They sign off, never, quite possibly to meet again, as identities shift frequently in these chat rooms. Cindy considers herself to be a reasonably happily married woman and has no desire to meet—in the flesh—her partners in cybersex.

So what is this? Is it adultery? Or it is just technologically enhanced masturbation? What do we think about this? Is anything at stake in deciding what to call it?

Case 4. In the next room, Cindy’s husband, Jim, has been engaged for many weeks on his computer in an elaborate role-playing dungeons-and-dragons type of game. He is a prince in the game, indeed, he is the prince who performs all sorts of deeds of daring-do and eventually wins the hand of the princess, performed by another flesh and blood player in the game. An elaborate marriage follows weeks of preparation and the prince, who adores his princess, is married in a cloud of orange blossoms and romance. So while Cindy is being pleased in the den, Jim is being married in the study. Is this then spiritual bigamy? Or rather cyberbigamy? And what do we think about this? Jim and Cindy strike one as an ordinary married couple, neither blissfully happy nor agonizingly unhappy. They have common projects, keeping the domestic ship afloat, paying the bills, getting the roof fixed, the boiler replaced. They have a child together, a ten year-old girl on whom they both dote. I offer these examples to suggest that we are perhaps not as clear about what constitutes betrayal in marriage as we thought we were.

I turn now to less ambiguous situations. I am writing as an older person primarily for older persons who are engaged in long-term relationships (but also for anyone to whom any of this will apply). Wasserstrom suggests that adultery might not be immoral in the following two circumstances: first, in a marriage in which the partners do not pledge mutual fidelity; in such an arrangement, there can be neither deceit nor broken promises. The second circumstance is one in which sexual behavior would not be invested with the importance we now bestow upon it; this would “encourage the enjoyment of sex more for its own sake” and would reject the centrality both of the association of sex with love and of sexual love with one and only one person (Wasserstrom 1984, 99). Wasserstrom deliberately does not answer the questions (a) whether sex can be so demystified or (b) whether it ought to be. He wonders what would be gained and what lost if we lived in a world in which sex had been demystified, that is, uncoupled from love so that it is no longer taken to be the ultimate expression of love and second, the decoupling of sex from the idea of sexual exclusivity.

I would answer these questions in the following way: I think that what would be gained from the demystification of sex would be fewer divorces, which impose special burdens on older women. What would be lost, as I see it, would be a great deal of unnecessary anguish.

Let us return to Case 2, the professional woman who has a one-night stand with an old friend. She knows from within that this adulterous act had nothing whatsoever to do with the love she feels for her husband. It was not a commentary on her marriage, or a sign that something was missing from her marriage. Her love for her husband is undimmed and undisturbed. With a start, she realizes that she has entered the psychic world of the “philandering” husband, a personage for whom she had heretofore felt only contempt.

People are burdened with what I believe are a number of beliefs about love and marriage which may or may not be true in certain cases, but which are almost always taken to be true across the board. First, there is the belief that sex with someone other than the spouse just means that conjugal love has been compromised, that it may be withdrawn or start to disappear. We also believe that we can only love one other person erotically (which explains the doubts expressed above about the viability of a very viable marriage). We believe too that sexual acts outside of marriage are in fact a judgment on the marriage (“She can’t be getting what she needs at home”) and, finally, that each of us can satisfy all of our partner’s needs all through the fifty years we are wed. The last belief is certainly false, but the others need not be true; indeed, in Case 2, they are not true and in many situations they are ideas that hold us captive.

Ah, you may be thinking, the one-night stand you describe is fairly inconsequential: what about the full-blown affair. Now people have affairs for all sorts of reasons: curiosity (say in Year 27 of the marriage); revenge; the attraction of forbidden fruit; boredom (in year 29); reassurance that they are still attractive (one of the dangers but for many, one of the necessities of middle age), and so on. Having an extramarital affair is one of the few ways to bring excitement into a humdrum middle age that doesn’t lose us our jobs or land us in jail. I am trying to figure out how common occurrences such as these can cause less pain.

The benefits of the demystification of sex depend on our learning both to think and to feel very differently about these matters than we do now. Is this possible? Insofar as I associate sexual connection of any degree of seriousness with love, then the mere fact that my partner is having an affair means that he doesn’t, indeed cannot love me any more. Shipwreck follows. I am angry, hurt, rejected, even humiliated; when he tells me that he loves me still and that he loves me as much as ever, of course I sneer. Next stop? The divorce lawyer. If my errant husband believes too in this inextricability, he may well misunderstand his own behavior and assume that he must love the other woman or he wouldn’t be so attracted to her.

Now what if I, the wronged wife (or husband) choose to believe that my spouse is not lying when he says that he still loves me? In such a case, my next stop need not be the divorce lawyer. After whatever need drove him to take a mistress (reassurance?) is satisfied, he may well return. What if it is true that he loves us both? I believe that Simone de Beauvoir loved both Sartre and Nelson Algren. I can love more

than one child at a time. But ah, you may say, it is different with erotic love. Beauvoir loved Algren erotically and Sartre, well, differently. But why do we feel so strongly that sexual love must be exclusive? It has not been so in many lives and in many cultures. Perhaps this is a holdover from oedipal days: jealous of siblings and spouses, we want absolute, exclusive and total possession of the beloved parent. But this is an infantile fantasy, unworthy of a mature adult. Why is it that we can mature intellectually, even morally, but in the realm of emotion, we do not outgrow childhood. Nevertheless, where there was irrationality, we must cultivate rationality.

What, then, are the virtues of the non-adulterous spouse who has had a measure of the “cognitive therapy” I propose and who wants to save her (or his) marriage? She (or he) must continue to demonstrate continuing love. She (or he) must avoid nagging or recriminations. She must practice patience, forbearance and understanding. She must cultivate these virtues even when she has murder in her heart. These are, of course, traditionally “feminine” virtues, but with the increasing mobility of women and their growing sexual self-determination² I am recommending them to men as well, to gays and lesbians in marriage-like unions, for “marriage” is more than a legal contract secured by the state. Moreover, the non-adulterous spouse who does not seek a breakup of the relationship but who now has some space in her life has the resources of the Internet and the personal columns of the local alternative press available to her (or him) as well.³

The adulterous spouse has an even harder row to hoe. He must persuade his spouse *in graphic ways* that he does in fact still love her. He must divide his time wisely, helping his spouse to avoid feeling neglected or lonely—a daunting proposition for anyone contemplating such a move. And he must avoid secrecy and deceit. There are few experiences more corrosive than sitting at home alone wondering “Where is he?” And there is much anguish in not knowing the “who” of the affair. Given the insecurity we all feel, it is all too easy for the one at home to fantasize a partner to the affair who is younger, thinner, much more attractive in every way, smarter and wittier and with a far better sexual technique. A good deal of the misery in such a situation is dispelled when the other turns out to be not a love-goddess at all but just Marge from the office. Adulterous spouses think that secrecy will protect the wife (or husband) from hurt; they are also trying to protect themselves from the spouse’s jealous wrath.

Ann Ferguson, in *Blood at the Root*, characterizes marriage, for many reasons, as a “risky” form of sexual activity (1989, 213). My analysis appears to confirm her judgment. An interrogation of the institution of marriage itself is quite beyond the scope of this paper.

Notes

1. Various studies put the rate of female adultery at 26%-38%; the estimates for men are somewhat higher. These are variable figures, for there are different percentages for younger married couples, for marriages of long duration; rates differ by race and social class as well. See Annette Lawson (1988), especially pages 75-79.
2. See Paula Kamen (2000).
3. I am assuming a mature readership that is fully informed about the dangers of and protection from sexually transmitted diseases.

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BOOK REVIEW

***Immovable Laws Irresistible Rights: Natural Laws, Moral Rights, and Feminist Ethics.* By Christine Pierce** Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000, pp. 180. \$29.95. ISBN: 0-7006-1070-7 (cloth).

Reviewed by Victoria Davion
University of Georgia

This book examines two major traditions of Western ethical theory, natural law and moral rights. The author argues that rights constitute a better foundation for ethics than does natural law. According to Pierce, "At the heart of this confrontation is a crucial conflict between the rights conception of rationality that places the autonomy of the individual at its center and the natural law conception of rationality that prioritizes humans, animals, and things by their places in a natural or 'rational' order of purposes—a hierarchy of beings all functioning in the service of some others." (1) In eleven chapters, Pierce provides a historical look at natural law approaches, examples of how natural law arguments are used in contemporary ethical and legal debates, a discussion of contemporary attempts to ground ethics in natural law, and convincing arguments as to why such attempts ultimately fail.

The claim that normative uses of concepts such as 'nature' and 'natural' are problematic is not new. However, appeals to these concepts remain at the forefront in contemporary moral debates. For example, in a recent piece on the ethical implications of human cloning, University of Chicago Professor Leon Kass makes the following pronouncement:

Sexual reproduction—by which I mean the generation of new life from (exactly) two complementary elements, one female, one male, (usually) through coitus—is established (if that is the right term) not by human decision, culture, or tradition, but by nature; it is the natural way of all mammalian reproduction. By nature each child has two complementary biological progenitors (Kass 1977, 21).

Regardless of what one thinks about the ethics of human cloning, what is of particular interest here is the way that the terms 'nature' and 'natural' are used both descriptively and

prescriptively, with no justification offered for the prescriptive aspect, other than its alleged descriptive accuracy. Such uses cut off ethical debate exactly at the point where it should begin. Therefore, a book that pays careful attention to the logic of appeals to "the natural order" continues to be relevant.

The first chapter, "Natural Law Language and Women," takes readers through the logic of appeals to the natural order. Pierce carefully shows how concepts such as 'proper sphere' and 'function' have been used to oppress women, suggesting that women have some essential "natural" function. She carefully deconstructs the logic of such appeals, showing how they make poor foundations for liberatory ethical theory. This chapter is excellent in showing exactly what is wrong with the descriptive/prescriptive slide that such appeals rely upon.

Chapter two, "Eros and Epistemology," examines Plato's views on whether women can be philosophers. The debate concerns whether Plato's position in Book V of the *Republic*, where he clearly states that women can be philosophers, is compromised by his position in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, that homoerotic love is a necessary part of the philosophical enterprise. Pierce challenges attempts by major Plato scholars to exclude women as potential philosophers, including the views of several feminist philosophers. She concludes that the need for homoerotic love need not exclude women, if one recognizes lesbianism as a form of homoerotic love. This is an interesting twist, as discussions of the topic have tended to argue either that heterosexual love could also be an avenue to philosophical joy, or that Plato's view excludes women.

Chapter three, "Natural Law and Moral Rights," is among the best in this book. Pierce argues here that there is a deep inconsistency in Kant's ethics between his acceptance of natural purposes and his use of moral personhood as the basis of a theory of rights. Basically, she argues that Kant's distinction between persons and things, which underlies his principle of humanity, relies on a theory of moral personhood deeply inconsistent with the notion of natural purposes. For Kant, what makes a person morally valuable is the ability to be autonomous, "to formulate and pursue different conceptions of the good" (31). Rights are supposed to safeguard against the treatment of persons as things. "However, a fundamental assumption of traditional natural law theory is that certain classes of persons are rightly treated as things, that is, their function or purpose is to serve the ends of someone else" (31). Hence, the notion that people should be respected because they can choose their own ends is incompatible with the idea that the ends of some other entity (God or nature) come first. In this chapter, Pierce does an excellent job of questioning whether a Kantian notion of persons as valuable in themselves could ever be consistent with natural law theory.

I found chapter four, "Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre's Psychoanalysis," to be the least "user friendly" in the collection. Pierce argues that "[u]nfortunately, Sartre's theory of human nature and its legitimacy implies a systematic inconsistency in his treatment of women; he insists repeatedly that there is no established, immutable human nature, yet in both his philosophy and his literary works he associates a fixed nature with the female" (36). While we might have expected Sartre's psychology to be liberatory in its denial of essentialism, it is not. This chapter makes references to many of Sartre's works, without explaining them in much detail.

Someone unfamiliar with Sartre's writings might have a hard time understanding it.

The next six chapters deal with a variety of applied topics in ethics, demonstrating both the use of natural law theory in contemporary ethical debates and legal debates, and showing why it is problematic. Chapter five, "AIDS and *Bowers v. Hardwick*," demonstrates how appeals to the "natural" were deployed in both discussions of AIDS in general and in a court case in particular that upheld Georgia sodomy laws. Chapter six, "Rights and Responsibilities," uses the example of doctor-patient relationships to show why rights are a necessary part of ethics that cannot be replaced by notions such as friendship and care. Chapter seven, "Postmodernism and Other Skepticisms," argues that postmodern critiques of the notion of objective truth regarding science and history don't necessarily apply to ethics, since ethical theories are not descriptive. This is an important point, and clearly made. Chapter eight, "Can Animals be Liberated," argues against the notion, popularized by Peter Singer, that animal liberation should be understood in the same way that liberation is understood in human liberation movements. Pierce convincingly argues that while animals may be morally valuable, the concept of 'liberation' is not correctly applied to them.

I got a charge out of reading both chapter nine, "Feminist Separatism," and chapter ten, "In Defense of Gay Marriage," as I disagree with Pierce's conclusions in both. Although I disagreed, I found her discussions interesting and often challenging. Chapter nine is a defense of separatism after the Mary Daly scandal.* Pierce argues that separation can be valuable both as a tool for political organizing, and for the formation of "...solidarity, pride, and for the celebration of common goals and an independent culture" (100). I completely agree with Pierce that the ability to deny access that is part of separatism is crucial for empowerment. However, I am left wondering about the "independent culture" to which she refers. The gay marriage chapter is a defense of extending the right to marry to gays and lesbians. Pierce goes through the debate in gay and lesbian literature on whether working for this is a worthwhile political goal. In the end, she argues that recognition of family status is a key reason to fight for gay marriage. In response to the fear that pursuing the goal of gay marriage will just promote the status quo in which single people are discriminated against, Pierce states "I think it is a far greater worry that the current invisibility as family is threatening to destroy any kind of decent life at all for lesbians and gay men in the United States" (114). This is, to say the least, an incredibly strong claim. Although I was not convinced of its conclusions, this chapter raises many important issues.

The final chapter is a critical discussion of a variety of recent attempts to use natural law theory as a foundation for ethics. Pierce discusses the views of contemporary theorists, including Christina L. H. Traina, Martha Nussbaum, Edward O. Wilson, Bruce Bagemihl, and Gabriel Rotello (also discussed in chapter five). This chapter is an excellent overview of the various ways the natural law idea continues to be used, and why it continues to be problematic.

Because natural law theory is highly problematic, yet incredibly durable and emerging in a number of prominent contemporary works, Pierce's book is timely and helpful. The chapters on Aristotle and Sartre are least accessible; the rest

of the chapters are accessible to readers at different levels, and provide important arguments as to why the natural law approach is not viable. I particularly recommend chapter three for a discussion on whether rights views and natural law theory can be made consistent, chapters two, five, and ten for an analysis of how natural law theory has been used to discriminate against women, gays, and lesbians, and chapter eleven for an excellent overview of contemporary uses of natural law theory, and account of why natural law approaches continue to fail.

* Mary Daly was stripped of her tenured position and fired from Boston College for insisting on teaching women-only classes. — Ed.

Work Cited

"The Wisdom of Repugnance: Why We Should Ban the Cloning Of Humans," by Leon R. Kass, *The New Republic*, Volume 2 (June 1997): 17-26.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Call For Papers: Florida Philosophical Review

Florida Philosophical Review: The Journal of the Florida Philosophical Association announces two calls for papers for Volume II, Issue 2 and Volume III, Issue 2 to be published in December 2002 and December 2003, respectively. We invite submissions from all interested persons both inside and outside the State of Florida. The *FPR* is an anonymously refereed, indexed publication adhering to standards of professional excellence. We welcome submissions representing a variety of philosophical approaches.

Philosophical Responses to Terrorism

For Vol. II, 2, the *FPR* invites papers on issues related to the recent terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Deadline for submissions is **August 1, 2002**. Among topics for consideration are:

The problem of evil

The distinction between individual and corporate (state, organizational) responsibility

Desert and the Limits of Punishment

Conceptions of Justice or Just War

Conceptual Analyses of Terrorism

Possible Tensions between Liberty and Security

Responsibilities of the Media/Cultural Analyses of Media Coverage and Political Rhetoric

Peace and Reconciliation

Understanding the 'Other'

Conceptions of Rationality

Theoretical and Practical Issues Related to Patriotism/Nationalism

Feminist Analyses of Conflict, Responsibility, Otherness, etc.

Other issues of relevance from epistemological, ethico-political, socio-cultural, and general philosophical standpoints

Graduate Student Issue

Vol. III, 2 is a special issue devoted primarily to the work of graduate students in philosophy and related disciplines on any areas of philosophical inquiry. Graduate students from any educational institution and from any philosophical background are invited to submit papers. The deadline for submissions is **August 1, 2003**.

The *FPR* accepts papers at all times of the year for consideration for publication in future issues. The *FPR* is published twice a year (June and December) and is a fully electronic, Internet based publication of the University of Central Florida Department of Philosophy. Information regarding publication schedule, current and past issues, guidelines for submissions, etc. is available at <http://www.cas.ucf.edu/philosophy/fpr>.

If you have any further questions, please contact the editors (Shelley Park and Nancy Stanlick) at fpr@mail.ucf.edu.

2. CONFERENCE: Midwest SWIP Fall Meeting

The Fall 2002 meeting of the Midwest Society For Women In Philosophy will be held at Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio, October 11-13 2002. For further information and local arrangements contact Nancy McHugh, mchugh@wittenberg.edu, phone: 937-327-6335 or Crista Lebens, lebensc@uwu.edu, phone 262-472-5269.

3. BOOK SERIES — Philosophy and Women

Rodopi Press announces a new special series within its Values Inquiry Book Series program, "Philosophy and Women." This special series is particularly appropriate for anthologies based on conference proceedings, and for books of specialized scholarly interest. For information about the series and about manuscript submission, please contact Dr. Laura Duhan Kaplan, Department of Philosophy, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte NC 28223, LDKaplan@email.uncc.edu.

4. FEAST: Feminist Ethics and Social Theory

a. Mission Statement:

Feminist Ethics and Social Theory (FEAST) is a professional organization dedicated to promoting feminist ethical perspectives in philosophy, moral, social and political life, law and public policy. Our aim is to further the development and clarification of new understandings of ethical and political concepts and concerns, especially as these arise out of feminist commitments. Through meetings, publications, and projects, we hope to increase the visibility and influence of feminist ethics, as well as feminist social and political theory, and to provide support to emerging scholars from diverse and underrepresented populations.

b. For More Information:

For more information, including membership and listserv information, and information on the next FEAST Conference, please see the FEAST webpage at <http://www.afeast.org> or email FEAST CoChair, Barbara Andrew bandrew@darkwing.uoregon.edu.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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Victoria Davion is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Georgia. She specializes in ethical theory, applied ethics, women's studies, and social and political philosophy and publishes in a variety of journals such as *Social Theory and Practice*, *Hypatia*, *Public Affairs Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Social Philosophy*. She is the founding and current editor of the international journal *Ethics and the Environment*; and she is co-editor (with Clark Wolf) of *The Idea of a Political Liberalism: Essays on Rawls* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

Wendy Donner is Professor of Philosophy at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. She is the author of *The Liberal Self: John Stuart Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy* (Cornell University Press, 1991), as well as articles on Mill in *The Cambridge Companion to Mill* and *The Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers*. She has published several articles on feminist ethics and environmental ethics and is now doing work on East West ethics, including work on Buddhist feminism and the environment.

Andrea Nicki teaches philosophy courses at Springfield College in Massachusetts. She has published articles on feminist virtue ethics and trauma. She is currently working on a manuscript that develops a conception of moral progression based on a reevaluation of some traditional moral vices that argues for their transformative potential. She is also a published poet and is working on a collection of poems that explores philosophically various emotions.

Lisa Tessman is Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Women's Studies at Binghamton University (S.U.N.Y.). She is currently working on a book that critically examines the possible uses of virtue ethics for communities involved in liberatory struggles, such as feminist communities and communities of people of color; the project aims to provide tools for communities to be reflective about the moral significance of both their own internal structures and their strategies of political resistance.

Joan Woolfrey is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at West Chester University in West Chester, PA. She specializes in ethical theory, bioethics and feminist ethics. She has published articles on physician-assisted suicide and human cloning. Her current research interests center around informed consent and assisted reproduction.