

Moral Understandings: Alternative “Epistemology” for a Feminist Ethics

MARGARET URBAN WALKER

Work on representing women's voices in ethics has produced a vision of moral understanding profoundly subversive of the traditional philosophical conception of moral knowledge. I explicate this alternative moral “epistemology,” identify how it challenges the prevailing view, and indicate some of its resources for a liberatory feminist critique of philosophical ethics.

When Annette Baier asked a few years ago what women wanted in a moral theory, the answer she arrived at was that moral *theory* was just what women *didn't* want, if a moral theory is a “fairly systematic account of a fairly large area of morality, with a keystone supporting all the rest” (Baier 1985, 55). Yet the latter is what a still dominant tradition of moral philosophy—stretching from Socrates through Sidgwick to Rawls—*does* want: a fairly compact system of very general but directly action-guiding principles or procedures. Current philosophical practice still largely views ethics as the search for moral knowledge, and moral knowledge as comprising universal moral formulae and the theoretical justification of these.

If one asks the somewhat different question of what a *feminist ethics* is, or should look like, one might have in mind some different things. One is that feminist ethics is one which clarifies the moral legitimacy and necessity of the kinds of social, political, and personal changes that feminism demands in order to end male domination, or perhaps to end domination generally.¹ Another conception of feminist ethics is that of one in which the moral perceptions, self-images, and senses of moral value and responsibility of women have been represented or restored. Philosophical ethics, as a cultural product, has been until recently almost entirely a product of some men's thinking. There are the usual reasons to suspect that those men will not have represented, or will not have represented truly, modes of life and forms of responsibility which aren't theirs, or which they could recognize fully only at the cost of acknowledging their interlocking gender, race and class privileges. While

female voices alone may not be sufficient correctives to this, they promise to be important ones. Here the tasks of restoration, reconstruction, and new construction are not sharply divided; all involve suspension and re-examination of unquestioned assumptions and standard forms.

The reconstructive project has been pioneered in work by Baier (1985; 1986; 1987), Carol Gilligan (1982), Nel Noddings (1984), Adrienne Rich (1976; 1979), Sara Ruddick (1984), Caroline Whitbeck (1983), and others. While the result in each case is distinctive, a lattice of similar themes—personal relations, nurturance and caring, maternal experience, emotional responsiveness, attunement to particular persons and contexts, sensitivity to open-ended responsibilities—has become the object of sharp criticism from *other* feminist quarters. While the criticisms too are varied, they include a variety of cognate concerns about whether the values and paradigms valorized in the reconstructive work are not mistaken and politically retrograde. Jean Grimshaw (1986), Claudia Card (1985), Jeffner Allen (1986), Lorraine Code (1987), Barbara Houston (1987), and others have asked whether maternal paradigms, nurturant responsiveness, and a bent toward responsibility for others' needs aren't our oppressive history, not our liberating future, and whether "women's morality" isn't a familiar ghetto rather than a liberated space.² It is fair, if oversimple, to say that some feminists question whether the reconstructive project can meet and nourish the politically normative one.³

The many crossing strands of this conversation beg for close consideration, but I will pull one thread loose from the reconstructive project and commend it to our further deliberation as a part, but only part, of an adequate and flexible feminist ethic. The thread I refer to in the reconstructive work is a profound and original rebellion against the regnant paradigm of moral knowledge mentioned in my opening paragraph. Hence, it might be called an *alternative moral epistemology*, a very different way of identifying and appreciating the forms of intelligence which define responsible moral consideration. This view does not imagine our moral understandings congealed into a compact theoretical instrument of impersonal decision for each person, but as deployed in shared processes of discovery, expression, interpretation, and adjustment between persons. Facets of this alternative view which appear repeatedly in reconstructive discussions are: attention to the particular; a way of constructing morally relevant understandings which is "contextual and narrative" (Gilligan 1982, 19); a picture of deliberation as a site of expression and communication.

Here are my limited aims. First, I model this alternative epistemology of moral understandings by describing its three elements and their affinities. Second, I identify how its features challenge the still hardy mainstream universalist tradition on moral knowledge. Finally, too briefly, I indicate some ways this particular result of the reconstructive approach to feminist

ethics answers to some concerns of the first, politically normative approach. Refusing the canonical "theory" option does not mean going without guidance in judgments and practices of countering domination. Neither does the alternative moral epistemology by itself require commitments to the specific moral values and paradigms lately in dispute among feminists.

I. ELEMENTS OF AN ALTERNATIVE MORAL EPISTEMOLOGY

A substantial number of contemporary women writers on morality have sounded the theme of attention to "particular others in actual contexts" (Held 1987, 118). Iris Murdoch (1970) sets an oft-cited precedent for this theme in her defense of *attention* ("loving regard" (40); "patient and just discernment" (38)) as the "characteristic and proper mark of the active moral agent" (34). In pointed opposition to the emphasis in most moral philosophy on conscientious adherence to principle, Murdoch insists instead on the "endless task" (28) of "good vision: unsentimental, detached, unselfish, objective attention" (65-66), which she calls *love*.⁴ More recent women writers who see acute and unimpeded perception of particular human beings as the condition of adequate moral response concur in Murdoch's epistemological point—her emphasis on a certain kind of understanding as central to morality.⁵

Ruddick (1984), for example, finds in the normative structure of maternal practices a rich display of that openness which allows for revelation of the particular individual. Maternal responsibility to foster growth, on Ruddick's account, requires certain recognitions: of the separate consciousness of another making its own sense of the world; of the common humanity of the other's familiar longings and impulses; of the need to give up expectations of repeatability in order to follow the distinct trajectory of a particular life (218-220). Such maternal virtues are ones Ruddick thinks it urgent to cultivate more widely. Whitbeck (1983) sees a similar sensibility enabling practices (such as teaching the young, nursing the sick, tending the body) for "the (mutual) realization of people" (65) which are typically considered "women's work." Related themes are sounded by others: Gilligan's reconstruction of the "care ethic" involves "the ability to perceive people in their own terms and to respond to their needs" (1984, 77); Benhabib (1987, 164) explores the "epistemic incoherence" of strategies of reversibility and universalization once the concreteness of other individuals has been covered over by the "generalized" conception of others in terms of an abstract *status*.⁶

Attention to particular persons as *a*, if not *the*, morally crucial epistemic mode requires distinctive sorts of understanding. Gilligan has usefully described the pattern of this thinking as "contextual and narrative" rather than "formal and abstract," where the latter "abstracts the moral problem from the interpersonal situation" (1982, 32), while the former invokes a "narrative of

relationships that extends over time" (1982, 28). Two elements are at work here: context and concreteness of individuals with specific "history, identity, and affective-emotional constitution" (Benhabib 1987, 163), and the special context that is a relationship, with its history, identity, and affective definition.

The two are linked by the notion of a narrative, of the location of human beings' feelings, psychological states, needs, and understandings as nodes of a story (or of the intersection of stories) that has already begun, and will continue beyond a given juncture of moral urgency. Conceptually, this means that we don't and can't identify people's emotions, intentions and other mental states with momentary (and especially not momentary inner, private) phenomena. Instead, we identify these features of people by attending to how their beliefs, feelings, modes of expression, circumstances and more, arranged in characteristic ways and often spread out in time, configure into a recognizable kind of story. Practically, this means that individual embroideries and idiosyncracies, as well as the learned codes of expression and response built up in particular relationships, and built up culturally around kinds of relationships, require of us very acute attention to the minute and specific, to history and incident, in grasping cases in a morally adequate way. If the others I need to understand really are actual others in a particular case at hand, and not repeatable instances or replaceable occupants of a general status, they will require of me an understanding of their/our story and its concrete detail. Without this I really cannot know *how* it is with others towards whom I will act, or what the meaning and consequence of any acts will be.

Whitbeck argues for a relational view of persons, of their historical being as "fundamentally a history of relationships to other people," and their actions as responses to the "whole configuration of relations" (1983, 76). She connects this view with the essentially responsive, discretionary character of moral responsibilities that relationships generate, responsibilities that cannot then be reduced to obligations and specified in uniform terms. Sharon Bishop (1987) has also examined the different light cast on moral responsibilities, problems, deliberation, resolution and guilt when one sees moral response as the attempt to mediate multiple, sometimes conflicting, moral claims that arise out of our many actual connections with other people and our needs to maintain them with integrity and sensitivity. This intertwining of selves and stories in narrative constructions which locate what is at stake, what is needed, and what is possible is at the heart of moral thinking for many women and feminist writers. The understanding of such stories requires many forms of intelligence; all are at work in the competent moral agent, according to these views.⁷

One form of intelligence that very often, if not typically, offers crucial resources for the resolution of moral problems is the *ability to communicate* among persons involved or affected. While this avenue to understanding is

not always open, it often enough is, and its efficacy is so obvious that it is astonishing how little attention is paid it in most nonfeminist moral philosophy. Even in that strain of theory that postulates or simulates an original agreement or compact, the role of communication in, as it were, the moral event is routinely ignored, and the moral agent on the spot is depicted in lonely cogitations (or sometimes in admirable but solo display of fixed habits of virtue). Given the particularistic paradigm of understanding and the situated conception of responsibility already discussed, it is not surprising that the resource of communication is often stressed in women's writing on morality. Gilligan stresses the commitment in the "care" ethic she describes to "activating the network [of relationships] by communication" (1982, 30); and Bishop's reconstrual of moral response as "offering compensation and mediating settlements" (1987, 12) pictures us as engaging those affected by our moral choices in tight places in a common search for constructive ways of answering unsatisfiable or competing claims. Benhabib even more directly challenges the "monological model of moral reasoning" with a proposal for a "communicative ethic of need interpretation," in which actual dialogue replaces hypothetical methods and fixed, prior constraints on "admissible" concerns (1987, 167; 169). Murdoch speaks of a mutual "obscurity" which makes the work of love endless (1970, 33), and urges on us the study of literature as an education in how to "picture and understand human situations" (34). We need not make our obscurity to each other worse by unnecessarily unilateral decision. We might just try turning to each other: talking and listening and imagining possibilities together.

II. FROM MORAL KNOWLEDGE TO MORAL UNDERSTANDINGS

The three elements of attention, contextual and narrative appreciation, and communication in the event of moral deliberation might be seen, in their natural interdependence, as an alternative epistemology of moral understanding, or the basis of one. This view, gleaned from the works of a variety of female and feminist writers, provides an alternative to a now standard and canonical (which is to say: professionally institutionalized) view of the form and point of ethics (or its philosophical elaboration).⁸ This view is both old and continuous enough to be called a tradition in the strongest sense, and we might call it the *universalist/impersonalist tradition*. In the words of one of its most explicit proponents, nineteenth-century utilitarian philosopher Henry Sidgwick,⁹ its goal is systematization of moral understanding, and its ideal of system is that of "precise general knowledge of what ought to be" (1907, 1), encoded in "directive rules of conduct" (2) which are "clear and decisive" (199) and "in universal form" (228). The rationale for pursuing a "scientifically complete and systematically reflective form" (425) in morals is that it "corrects" and "supplements" our scattered intuitions, and resolves "uncer-

tainties and discrepancies" in moral judgment. By useful abstraction it steers us away from, in Sidgwick's words, "obvious sources of error" which "disturb the clearness" of moral discernment (214). For Sidgwick, such distractions include complexity of circumstances, personal interests, and habitual sympathies. Thus, according to Sidgwick, only precise and truly universal principles can provide for "perfection of practice no less than for theoretical completeness" (262).

This capsule description of standard intent and methodology aims to bring into relief its very general picture of morality as individuals standing before the bar of impersonal truth. Moral responsibility is envisioned as responsiveness to the impersonal truths in which morality resides; each individual stands justified if he or she can invoke the authority of this impersonal truth, and the moral community of individuals is secured by the conformity (and uniformity) guaranteed by obedience to this higher authority.¹⁰ From an epistemological angle, one might gloss this view as: adequacy of moral understanding increases as this understanding approaches systematic generality.

The alternative moral epistemology already outlined, holds, to the contrary, that: adequacy of moral understanding decreases as its form approaches generality through abstraction. A view consistent with this will not be one of individuals standing singly before the impersonal dicta of Morality, but one of human beings connected in various ways and at various depths responding to *each other* by engaging together in a search for shareable interpretations of their responsibilities, and/or bearable resolutions to their moral binds. These interpretations and resolutions will be constrained not only by how well they protect goods we can share, but also by how well they preserve the very human connections that make the shared process necessary and possible. The long oscillation in Western moral thought between the impersonal and the personal viewpoints is answered by proposing that we consider, fully and in earnest, the *interpersonal* view.

The result of this alternative epistemology is not, then, an "opposite number" or shadow image of impersonalist approaches; it is instead a point of departure for a *variety* of different problematics, investigations, focal concerns, and genres of writing and teaching about ethics, many of which we have not, I suppose, yet clearly imagined. Some philosophical endeavors are obviously relevant. We might pay greater attention to the pragmatics of communication (of what people mean and do when they address each other, and not just what their words mean). We could explore more fully how moral paradigms and exemplary particular cases are made points of reference for shareable judgments, how they are explicated and how analogies are drawn with them. A lively interest in understanding how various factors (semantic, institutional, political) shape our ability to arrive at shared interpretations is needed, as is a questioning of barriers between philosophical, literary, critical, and empirical investigations of moral life. These endeavors can,

however, be carried out in a cheerfully piecemeal fashion; we need not expect or require the results to eventuate in a comprehensive systematization.

The analogue of this on the practical level is the expectation of constant "moral remainders," to adopt a phrase in recent philosophical use. 'Moral remainders' refers to some genuine moral demands which, because their fulfillment conflicted with other genuine moral demands, are "left over" in episodes of moral choice, and yet are not just nullified.¹¹ Whether this sort of thing is even possible is an issue in contemporary moral philosophy.¹² But if moral life is seen as a tissue of moral understandings which configure, respond to, and reconfigure relations as they go, we should anticipate residues and carry-overs as the rule rather than the exceptions: one's choice will often be a selection of one among various imperfect responses, a response to some among various claims which can't all be fulfilled. So there will just as often be unfinished and ongoing business, compensations and reparations, postponements and returns. Moral problems on this view are nodal points in progressive histories of mutual adjustment and understanding, not "cases" to be closed by a final verdict of a highest court.

III. FROM EPISTEMOLOGY TO PRACTICE

Although I've cast the discussion here in terms of moral "epistemology," my point has been that there is a way of looking at the understanding critical to and distinctive of full moral capacity on which this understanding is *not* really an *episteme*, not a nomologically ordered theory. From the alternative view, moral understanding comprises a collection of perceptive, imaginative, appreciative, and expressive skills and capacities which put and keep us in unimpeded contact with the realities of ourselves and specific others.¹³

It's also true that a picture of moral understanding is not a whole moral view. Indeed, the alternative moral "epistemology" sketched here leaves open to consideration many questions about which sorts of values enable moral agents to express themselves and hear others, to interpret wisely, and to nourish each other's capacities for supple attentiveness. It also leaves open what other values not directly related to these expressive and receptive capacities are those a feminist ethics ought to endorse. It does not promote one kind of relationship as paradigmatic of moral encounter, and invites us to explore the resources and impediments to expression, reception and communication in relationships of many kinds. Yet the priority it gives to voicing and hearing, to being answerable in and for specific encounters and relationships promises, I believe, potent critical resources. The most obvious ones I see are its structural capacity to challenge "principled" moral stances in the concrete, where these are surrogates for, or defenses against, responsiveness in actual relationships; to export an insistence on the primacy of personal acknowledgement and communication to institutional and "stranger" contexts;

and on a philosophical plane to pierce through the rhetoric of ethics to the *politics of ethics* as a routine matter.¹⁴

In the first instance, an ethic based on this alternative picture of moral understanding is set to challenge fundamentally and consistently the way the universalist tradition has institutionalized *indirect* ways of relating as moral *paradigms*. By 'indirect' here I mean ways of appreciating persons and situations mediated through what are typically some few, entrenched parameters of status, right, principle, or duty. The alternative picture discussed here confronts this "policed sociability" (Skillen 1978, 170) of universalism with an alternative ideal of *moral objectivity*: that of unimpeded, undistorted, and flexible appreciation of unrepeatable individuals in what are often distinctive situations and relationships. Morally relevant categories on this view include the full, nuanced range of expressive resources for articulating and constructing interpersonal life. By contrast, the ways of describing and expressing to which universalist morality permits moral relevance are typically limited to those which are "repeatable," "universalizable," "impartial," or "impersonal," i.e., those that embody the forms of detachment that are taken by universalism as constitutive of "the moral point of view."

Universalism presses me to view you, for instance, as a holder of a certain right, or a promisee, or a satisfaction-function, or a focus of some specifiable set of obligatory responses. I am pressed to structure my response or appeal to you in terms which I can think of as applying repeatably to any number of other cases. If we step into the alternative framework, however, we see universalist morality as thus "curbing our imaginations" (Lovibond 1983, 199) by enforcing communicative and reflective strategies which are interpersonally *evasive*. Universalism, for example, tends to regiment moral thinking so that negligent or willful inattention to need and expectation in the course of daily life is readily seen as "mere insensitivity," a non-moral failing, when it is not in dereliction of explicit "duties." Worse, it legitimates *uniformly* assuming the quasi-administrative or juridical posture of "the" (i.e., universal) moral point of view. Yet in many cases assuming that viewpoint may foreclose the more revealing, if sometimes painful, path of expression, acknowledgement, and collaboration that could otherwise lead to genuinely responsive solutions.

A principled appeal to "fairness" or "what one promised" or what "right" one has to something or why "anyone" should expect a certain response may be a summarily effective arguing point. But if it is brought forth in an intricate situation of an ongoing relationship, it may also be the most effective way to stymie or silence your interlocutor—spouse, lover, friend, student, partner, patient—without addressing many questions. The avoided questions may include just the morally relevant ones about the particular needs and harms, the expectations and forms of trust, and the character and future of *that* relationship. Feminists have special and acute needs to fend off this sys-

tematic de-personalizing of the moral and de-moralizing of the personal. For on a practical level what feminists aspire to depends as much on restructuring our senses of moral responsibility in intimate partnerships, sexual relations, communities of personal loyalty, and day-to-day work relations as it clearly does on replacing institutional, legal, and political arrangements.

The alternative picture also invites us not to be too tempted by the “separate spheres” move of endorsing particularism for personal or intimate relations, universalism for the large-scale or genuinely administrative context, or for dealings with unknown or little-known persons. While principled, generalized treatments may really be the best we can resort to in many cases of the latter sort, it is well to preserve a lively sense of the *moral incompleteness* or inadequacy of these resorts. This is partly to defend ourselves against dispositions to keep strangers strange and outsiders outside, but it is also to prevent our becoming comfortable with essentially distancing, depersonalizing, or paternalistic attitudes which may not really be the only resorts if roles and institutions can be shaped to embody expressive and communicative possibilities. It is often claimed that more humanly responsive institutions are not practical (read: instrumentally efficient). But if moral-practical intelligence is understood consistently in the alternative way discussed (the way appropriate to relations among persons), it may instead be correct to say that certain incorrigibly impersonal or depersonalizing institutions are too morally impractical to be tolerated. It is crucial to examine how structural features of institutionalized relations—medical personnel, patients and families; teachers, students and parents; case workers and clients, for example—combine with typical situations to enable or deform the abilities of all concerned to hear and to be heard. Some characteristically modern forms of universalist thinking may project a sort of “moral colonialism” (the “subjects” of my moral decisions disappear behind uniform “policies” I must impartially “apply”) precisely because they were forged historically with an eye to actual colonization—industrial or imperial.¹⁵

Finally, this kind of moral epistemology reminds us that styles of moral thinking are not primarily philosophical brain-teasers, data begging for the maximally elegant theoretical construction, but are ways of answering to *other people* in terms of some responsibilities that are commonly recognized or recognizable in some community. Philosophical representations of these styles will both reflect and reinforce the relations of authority, power, and responsibility they encode. Hence, for moral philosophy to be sincerely reflective, it must attend focally to questions heretofore considered “philosophically” inappropriate: questions about the rhetoric and politics of ethics. These are questions about the discursive and expressive formats which have been declared appropriate to the task of representing moral life, and about who has the standing (and the access to institutionalized forums) to make, and to challenge, the “rules” (including substantive assumptions) of the

genre. When we construct and consider representations of our moral situations, we need to ask: what actual community of moral responsibility does this representation of moral thinking purport to represent? Who does it actually represent? What communicative strategies does it support? Who will be in a position (concretely, socially) to deploy these strategies? Who is in a position to transmit and enforce the rules which constrain them? In what forms of activity or endeavor will they have (or fail to have) an application, and who is served by these activities?

These questions are hard for philosophers to ask; it flies in the face of the professional self-image of supposedly disinterested searchers after timeless moral truth to recognize that a moral philosophy is a particular rhetoric too, situated in certain places, sustained and deployed by certain groups of people. Its apparent form may belie its real application and meaning. For example, philosophers have long insisted on "the universal" in ethics, and continue, I find, to insist on formal universality of norms, concepts, or procedures as the key moral bulwark against bias and injustice. Yet the rhetoric of universality has been entirely compatible, as feminist philosophers have repeatedly shown, with the most complete (and often intentional) exclusion of women as moral agents from such loftily universal constructs as the social contract, pure practical rationality, or the good life for man, and with bypassing altogether in application whole areas of life that are the province of women (voluntarily or not), such as the rearing of children.¹⁶

Further, not only the substance and presuppositions but also the standard discursive forms of moral philosophy—its canonical styles of presentation, methods of argument, characteristic problems—require pragmatic evaluation. These forms include stark absence of the second person and the plural in projections of philosophical deliberation; virtual exclusion of collaborative and communicative modes of formulating and negotiating moral problems; regimentation of moral "reasoning" into formats of deductive argument; reliance on schematic examples in which the few "morally relevant" factors have already been selected and in which social-political context is effaced; and omission of continuing narratives that explore the interpersonal sequels to moral "solutions." These are rhetorical conventions which curb the moral imaginations of academic philosophers drastically. Alarming, we visit them on our students as we "refine" their moral thinking, obscuring morally significant features of everyday life, personal relations, and the social conditions which structure them.

There are alternatives to the abstract, authoritarian, impersonal, universalist view of moral consciousness. The picture of direct mutual response and responsibility is not a whole ethics, but it is one way of rotating the axis of our investigation around the fixed point of our real need.¹⁷

NOTES

1. This view of feminist ethics does not rule out in principle that some currently prominent view in philosophical ethics, properly applied, can be a feminist ethics. Although this possibility seems less promising currently, early feminist discussions of issues like abortion, rape, and pornography often invoked standard notions of rights, respect, or the promotion of happiness. And it is still a fact that in our given political culture appeals to moral standards which cohere with liberal political ideas are potent and indispensable tools in pursuing feminist social and legal objectives.

2. Grimshaw is specially critical of claims that women's moral *thinking* is characteristically different; Code criticizes "maternalism;" Houston discusses objections by Card, Allen and others. For critical reactions to Gilligan's work, see Nails et al. (1983), Kerber et al. (1986) and Michaels (1986).

3. I don't mean to make this dialogue sound too bipolar. Virginia Held (1987) is cautious on the issue of jettisoning principles to particularism. Marilyn Friedman (1987) combines a plea for the integration of justice and caring values with the view that the character of particularized moral commitments does not combine with rule-based respect. Both Held and Friedman tentatively suggest the application of different moral approaches to different "spheres" of life or different kinds of relationships. But see my section III, below, on the "separate spheres" idea.

4. Murdoch herself credits her conception of a "just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality" (34) to Simone Weil, whose views are complicated enough, (and ambivalent enough, from the viewpoint I'm discussing here) to require quite separate consideration.

5. Many may not share the Platonism, Freudian psychology, theory of art, or other views to which Murdoch joins her views on love. One subtle critique of the deep social conservatism of Murdoch's views is provided by Sabina Lovibond (1983, 189-200).

6. See Held (1987); Noddings (1984, chapters 1 and 4). See also Nussbaum (1983) on reviving the Aristotelian notion of perception as "appropriate acknowledgement" of the particular person in the face of the blinding urge to preserve preconceived, harmonious orderings of abstracted value.

7. See also Diamond (1983) on the importance of grasping the moral "texture" of individuals (an idea she attributes to Iris Murdoch).

8. The difference between representing morality and "rationally reconstructing" it philosophically is not always clear, and this is itself a source of deep problems, substantively and methodologically. Addelson (1987), for example, deeply challenges the appropriateness and moral legitimacy of an academic practice of philosophical ethics (if I understand her correctly). I take this challenge quite seriously, even as I right now continue to do a version of academic philosophical ethics.

9. Sidgwick's work richly repays study if one wants to see in explicit and self-conscious form the "rules" of the genre of today's philosophical ethics. But one could find the same rules formulated (or implicitly honored) in any number of mainstream twentieth century authors.

10. Since writing this I have discovered a parallel characterization in Anthony Skillen's description of modern bourgeois moral consciousness as a blend of "abstract authoritarianism" and "generalized disciplinarianism" (Skillen 1978, 153).

11. A standard example would be that in which two promises, each sincerely and responsibly made, turn out to be contingently incapable of both being kept. In such cases, whichever commitment I fulfill, another will have been neglected. Bishop (1987, 13ff.) discusses the importance of taking the longer view of such cases.

12. A number of widely known essays which debate the issues about dilemmas and moral remainders are collected in Gowans (1987).

13. A moral epistemology of the sort described finds common or overlapping cause with a number of other contemporary deviations from dominant views. For critics of impartiality on behalf of the personal life, see Williams (1981), Blum (1980), and Stocker (1976). On interrogating moral views for their concrete social and historical conditions, see MacIntyre (1981). For insistence on the primacy of judgments in particular cases, see the new Aristotelians, Nussbaum (1986) and Wiggins (1978). For other versions of "responsibility ethics" which situate moral claims in relational structures of power and dependency, see Goodin (1985) and Jonas (1984).

On morality as a tissue of acknowledgements and refusals, see Cavell (1979, Parts 3 and 4). And on morality as constituted by social practices and as expressive of relations of authority in, respectively, a Marxist and a Wittgensteinian-Hegelian vein see Skillen (1978) and Lovibond (1983). All these may be, used selectively, resources for a different kind of ethics. Yet feminists might remain wary of unwanted residues and omissions in some of these views.

14. On the political aspects of construction and deployment of modes of rationality and styles of thought with respect to gender, see essays by Ruddick, Addelson, and Harding in Kittay and Meyers (1987). See also Calhoun (1988) for a discussion of the way philosophers' neglect of certain topics reinforces moral ideologies.

15. In this connection see Skillen (1978, Chapter 4) on both Kantian and utilitarian disciplinarianism and Williams (1985, Chapter 6) on Sidgwickian "government house utilitarianism."

16. Baier (1986; 1987) is particularly humane and lucid on this topic.

17. Special thanks to Sandra Bartky for very good suggestions on an earlier and briefer draft of this paper, and to the editors and readers for helpful suggestions.

REFERENCES

- Addelson, Kathryn. 1987. Moral passages. In *Women and moral theory*. Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Allen, Jeffner. 1986. *Lesbian philosophy: Explorations*. Palo Alto, California: Institute of Lesbian Studies.
- Baier, Annette. 1985. What do women want in a moral theory? *Nous* 19: 53-63.
- Baier, Annette. 1986. Trust and anti-trust. *Ethics* 96: 231-260.
- Baier, Annette. 1987. The need for more than justice. In *Science, morality & feminist theory*. Marsha Hanen and Kai Nielsen, eds. Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary Press.
- Benhabib, Seyla. 1987. The generalized and the concrete other. In *Women and moral theory*. Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Bishop, Sharon. 1987. Connections and guilt. *Hypatia* 2(1):7-23.
- Blum, Lawrence. 1980. *Friendship, altruism and morality*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Calhoun, Cheshire. 1988. Justice, care, gender bias. *The Journal of Philosophy* 85: 451-463.
- Card, Claudia. 1985. Virtues and moral luck. Working Series I, No. 4, Institute for Legal Studies, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Law School.
- Cavell, Stanley. 1979. *The claim of reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Code, Lorraine. 1987. Second persons. In *Science, morality & feminist theory*. Marsha Hanen and Kai Nielsen, eds. Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary Press.
- Diamond, Cora. 1983. Having a rough story about what moral philosophy is. *New Literary History* 15: 155-169.

- Friedman, Marilyn. 1987. Beyond caring: The de-moralization of gender. In *Science, morality & feminist theory*. Marsha Hanen and Kai Nielsen, eds. Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary Press.
- Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In a different voice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gilligan, Carol. 1984. The conquistador and the dark continent: Reflections on the psychology of love. *Daedalus* 113: 75-95.
- Goodin, Robert. 1985. *Protecting the vulnerable*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gowans, Christopher. 1987. *Moral dilemmas*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Grimshaw, Jean. 1986. *Philosophy and feminist thinking*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hanen, Marsha and Kai Nielsen, eds. 1987. *Science, morality & feminist theory*. Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary Press.
- Held, Virginia. 1987. Feminism and moral theory. In *Women and moral theory*. Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Houston, Barbara. 1987. Rescuing womanly virtues: Some dangers of moral reclamation. In *Science, morality & feminist theory*. Marsha Hanen and Kai Nielsen, eds. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Jonas, Hans. 1984. *The imperative of responsibility*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kerber, Linda, et al. 1986. On *In a different voice*: An interdisciplinary forum. *Signs* 11: 304-333.
- Kittay, Eva Feder and Diana T. Meyers, eds. 1987. *Women and moral theory*. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Lovibond, Sabina. 1983. *Realism and imagination in ethics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1981. *After virtue*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Michaels, Meredith. 1986. Morality without distinction. *The Philosophical Forum* 17: 175-187.
- Murdoch, Iris. [1970] 1985. *The sovereignty of good*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Nails, Debra, Mary Ann O'Loughlin and James C. Walker, eds. 1983. *Social research* 50.
- Noddings, Nel. 1984. *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 1983. Flawed crystals: James's *The golden bowl* and literature as moral philosophy. *New Literary History* 15: 25-50.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 1986. *The fragility of goodness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Rich, Adrienne. 1976. *Of woman born*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Rich, Adrienne. 1979. *On lies, secrets, and silence*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Ruddick, Sara. 1984. Maternal thinking. In *Mothering*. Joyce Trebilcot, ed. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld.
- Sidgwick, Henry. [1907] 1981. *The methods of ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- Skillen, Anthony. 1978. *Ruling illusions*. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press.
- Stocker, Michael. 1976. The schizophrenia of modern ethical theories. *The Journal of Philosophy* 73: 453-466.
- Whitbeck, Caroline. 1983. A different reality: Feminist ontology. In *Beyond domination*. Carol C. Gould, ed. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld.
- Wiggins, David. 1978. Deliberation and practical reason. In *Practical reasoning*. Joseph Raz, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, Bernard. 1981. *Moral luck*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, Bernard. 1985. *Ethics and the limits of philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.