

existing only in the bourgeoisie. John Stuart Mill and William Thompson, as well as various white critics of slavery, are examples regarding the oppression of women and slaves, respectively.

- 27 hooks, *Feminist Theory*, p. 161.
- 28 Cf. hooks, *Feminist Theory*, p. 17 and ch. 4.
- 29 Cf. Lugones and Spelman, 'Have We Got a Theory', pp. 576 and 581.
- 30 A. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983), remains the best and most detailed introduction to the main political divisions between feminists.
- 31 Some theorists, notably socialist feminists, acknowledged (some) differences fairly early on: see Lynne Segal, 'Generations of Feminism', *Radical Philosophy* 83 (1997). It is also worth remembering that the initial project of second-wave feminism was to 'establish . . . that *all* women were oppressed in similar ways, that women shared something in common across the lines of class, race, culture, etc.' (Alison Jaggar, personal communication).
- 32 I do not address the possibility of an alternative, relativist reading of a plurality of standpoints. I think relativism is not an attractive position for feminists, but I cannot provide an argument here.
- 33 E.g. J. Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990).
- 34 By 'commonality' I mean something like the list I give in this sentence, i.e.: common conceptualizations, formulations and claims, common values, interests and strategies. Which commonalities are relevant will depend on the discussion at hand. Note also that commonalities are not necessarily fixed and stable (see section 5 and note 39 below).
- 35 For a more detailed discussion of this point see section 5.
- 36 The recent 'discovery' and success of mediation in various arenas of seemingly irresolvable conflict attests to this, I think.
- 37 For a discussion of group representation see Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, ch. 6, and Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
- 38 See also Jaggar, 'Feminist Conception', pp. 127-8 and 133.
- 39 It is interesting to note how conceptions of difference as mainly socially constructed can lead to much less pessimistic conclusions than conceptions of difference modelled on cultural or religious differences: the latter, typically found in liberal political theories, seem irresolvable and therefore have to be relegated to the private sphere so as to not be too politically explosive; the former, derived from (marxist, feminist, anti-racist) theories of social oppression and liberation, leave hope for a political resolution of these differences via social and political change.
- 40 Lugones and Spelman, 'Have We Got a Theory', p. 577; see also P. Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 36-7.
- 41 I use 'aspects or phases' since I want to avoid the implication that they cannot both occur simultaneously.

II

MARILYN FRIEDMAN

Feminism in ethics Conceptions of autonomy

Feminist ethics

Ethics, or moral philosophy, as a field of intellectual inquiry developed in the west for well over two thousand years with minimal input from women. Women's voices have been virtually absent from western ethics until this century, as they have been from every field of intellectual endeavour. The absence of female voices has meant that the moral concerns of men have preoccupied traditional western ethics, the moral perspectives of men have shaped its methods and concepts, and male biases against women have gone virtually unchallenged within it. Feminist ethics explores the substantive effect of this imbalance on moral philosophy and seeks to rectify it.

Like other areas of feminist thought, feminist ethics is grounded in a commitment to ending the oppression, subordination, abuse and exploitation of women and girls, wherever these may arise. In the late 1960s, when feminist ethics began, it consisted mainly of applying the resources of traditional moral philosophy to the array of moral issues that were being brought to public attention by the women's movements then arising in many western societies. Those issues, such as economic discrimination against women, restrictive sex roles, domestic violence, rape, inegalitarian marriage and ideals of self-sacrificing motherhood, were of special concern to women and had been largely neglected by traditional philosophical ethics. Feminist ethics, from the start, thus sought to shift philosophical attention to topics that philosophers, almost exclusively male, had previously ignored.

To be sure, some of the issues of special concern to women, such as prostitution and pornography, had already received attention from the predominantly male philosophical profession. In addition, abortion, though not much discussed professionally prior to 1970, became a hot topic for philosophers in general soon after 1970 as a result of the growing

trend toward decriminalization of abortion in western countries. The feminist innovation has been not so much to introduce such topics to philosophical audiences as to emphasize dimensions that had otherwise been neglected, such as the perspectives of the women involved, the relevant gender relationships, and the cultural context of women's subordination. On the subject of pornography, for example, the mostly male, non-feminist philosophers had debated whether the mere *use* of sexually explicit and arousing materials was itself immoral. Feminists, by contrast, turned their attention to the impact of pornography on *women*, particularly whether its production and use promoted women's subordination, objectification, or vulnerability to sexual assault.¹

By the early 1980s, the concepts and strategies of feminist ethics had grown in complexity, and feminist ethics emerged as a self-consciously distinct area of feminist theory. Instead of merely applying traditional ethical tools to women's issues, as had been the trend in the 1970s, feminist ethics now turned its attention also to the tools themselves. Careful analysis exposed what seemed to be male biases in the very concepts and methods of traditional philosophical ethics. Not only had male philosophers neglected women-centred issues; they had also developed tools of articulation, interpretation, and analysis that appeared to reflect their male standpoints, despite a presumption of abstract universality. Feminist philosophers accordingly sought to introduce specifically female moral perspectives into philosophical ethics and to forge conceptual and methodological tools that reflected women's standpoints.

A major catalyst for this development came from feminist research in the field of moral psychology, particularly that of Carol Gilligan.² Based on empirical studies, Gilligan reported a significant degree of correlation between gender and moral orientation. According to her early writings, males are characteristically concerned with substantive moral matters of justice, rights, autonomy and individuation. In their moral reasonings, they tend to rely on abstract principles and to seek universality of scope. Women, by contrast, are more often concerned with substantive moral matters of care, personal relationships and avoiding hurt to others. They tend to avoid abstract principles and universalist pretensions and to focus instead on contextual detail and interpersonal emotional responsiveness.

Gilligan's ideas were not entirely new to feminist thought. By the early 1980s, some feminist theorists had already begun to theorize that caring relationships entered significantly into women's conceptions of selfhood and personal identity.³ Gilligan gave this trend great impetus, by articulating those concerns in the form of a detailed moral perspective, one that contrasted starkly with male-generated traditions of thought in moral

psychology and philosophy. She also provided empirical evidence for regarding the care perspective as a distinctively female moral orientation.

Perhaps most importantly, Gilligan *honoured* what she presented as women's moral reasoning; she presented care ethics as a moral equal to traditional justice-oriented moral theories. Her work thus epitomized a feminist approach already emerging at the time that some would later call 'cultural feminism'.⁴ According to this approach, women have distinctive traits as women, but these traits are not necessarily inferior to those of men; they are sometimes as valuable as, or even superior to, those of men. The real social problem for women is not so much that they have been denied opportunities to attain the experiences or character traits of men, but rather that society has failed to appreciate or reward what is distinctively valuable in *women's* character traits. 'Man' had indeed been 'the measure of all things', and women had been mismeasured and unfairly found wanting by that standard. Instead of seeking opportunities for women to emulate men's traditional lives or viewpoints, cultural feminists wanted to elevate social esteem for the equal, and sometimes superior, merits of women's distinctive perspectives and concerns.

While there is certainly more to feminist ethics than Gilligan's account of care ethics, the influence of this account on moral philosophy is significant in a number of ways. First, it stimulated many philosophers to consider whether moral concepts and methodologies are, in some substantive sense, gender-based or gender-biased. The idea that different genders tend to adopt different moral perspectives resonated then, and still does today, with the experiences of many people. Indeed, it has widespread non-academic appeal, as shown, for example, by popular bestsellers that tell us that women are 'from Venus' while men are 'from Mars'.⁵ Gilligan grounded those gender stereotypes in specific moral traits and attitudes. She thereby provided resources for feminists to use in arguing that certain moral concepts and methods were not universal after all but were instead mere reflections of a characteristically male moral standpoint.

Second, Gilligan's care/justice dichotomy contributed to a movement that was already under way in the field of ethics generally – the search for alternative moral orientations to the utilitarian and Kantian frameworks which had dominated ethical theory through the 1970s and which still loom large over the field. On Gilligan's interpretation, the two competing mainstays of modern ethical theory, utilitarianism and Kantian ethics, appear rather more like allies than opponents. Defenders of both of those traditions tend to regard the moral point of view as impartial, impersonal, universal and principle-based, and to give great importance to matters of justice. The recent revival of Aristotelian ethics, with its emphasis on virtue

and community, has been a product of the mainstream search for alternatives to utilitarianism and Kantian ethics. Gilligan's care ethic offers yet another seeming alternative to those ethical traditions.

To be sure, Gilligan wavers in her treatment of the relationship between care and justice orientations. Sometimes Gilligan suggests that care and justice perspectives are distinct and mutually exclusive moral outlooks which, like the alternative aspects under which different patterns are found in ambiguous gestalt images, cannot be utilized simultaneously. At other times, however, she suggests that care and justice perspectives are each incomplete, and that they can and should be integrated to form a truly adequate, more 'mature' moral orientation. On this latter approach, care could be reinterpreted as a part of justice toward loved ones, or justice could be reinterpreted as a special mode of caring for others. There is as yet no general agreement on the relationship between care ethics and moral theories that emphasize justice. A wise working strategy for the present time is to regard care ethics as at the very least an account of a distinctive style or approach to ethical problems and concerns.

Thus, third, Gilligan's conception of a moral perspective centred specifically on caring and personal relationships moves those concerns to moral centre stage. In addition to promoting the search for alternative moral theories, a care ethic highlights the moral importance of caring practices, moral attentiveness to other persons in their unique particularity, and the sheer maintenance of the social fabric of close personal relationships. As they had developed by the early 1980s, neither utilitarianism nor Kantian ethics had devoted much attention to these matters. Even Aristotelian ethics pays little attention to caring and to the efforts required to maintain relationships.

In modern moral theory, concerns pertaining to close personal relationships and private domains of life, such as sexuality, family and friendship have tended to be ignored. Although the canonical figures of philosophical ethics all had something to say about these domains of life, the written works which have dominated ethical discourse in recent centuries focus on matters of public morality, that is, matters that presuppose no close or special connection between persons. Gilligan's writings belong to a growing counter-current in ethics toward regarding the *personal* point of view as an appropriate, and perhaps the only possible, standpoint for justified moral reasoning. Many mainstream moral philosophers had previously held that justification in moral reasoning requires such features as impartiality and universalizability. The personal point of view reflects someone's distinctive history, embodiment and network of social relationships, not to mention her desires and emotions. It seems to be irreducibly

partial and particular. The notion that the personal point of view is unavoidable in moral reasoning thus requires a reconceptualization of what it means for moral reasoning, or, more broadly, moral understanding, to be justified. Particularly for sympathizers of care ethics, a moral perspective that is self-reflectively aware of its own relational-embeddedness is superior as a standpoint for moral reasoning to any would-be detached, disinterested, impartial, universalistic point of view.

In virtue of this focus on the personal, a fourth influence of Gilligan's work was to add a feminist perspective to another trend in philosophy – the defence of the role of emotion in moral life. Mainstream moral philosophy had previously tended to view the moral point of view as based on reason. Emotion was regarded not merely as irrelevant but as a cause of bias and distortion in moral understanding. Some mainstream philosophers had already begun to argue on various grounds that emotion was morally important.⁶ Feminists added to this challenge the idea that the denigration of emotion was part and parcel of the cultural devaluation of women. Defending emotion, including its role in moral understanding, has become for feminists part of the project of elevating cultural esteem for women.

Fifth, Gilligan's work contributed to the growing conviction that women are more relationally oriented than men, and that men are more individualistic than women. This conviction is widespread among feminists despite their reluctance to generalize about the moral perspectives of all women. Many feminists believe that women are more likely than men to realize and acknowledge the interdependencies between people, and that people's identities depend upon those interdependencies. Men, on this view, are more likely than women to ignore the importance of relationships. As a result, men are more likely than women to retain an implausibly individualistic outlook and to seek an impersonal, impartial, universalistic stance for moral reasoning.

Gilligan's work was followed by a torrent of feminist-inspired writings about personal relationships, caring and nurturing, the differences between care and justice, relational self-identity and the importance of emotional responsiveness to others. Contributors to this development include: Annette Baier, Seyla Benhabib, Lawrence Blum, Claudia Card, Owen Flanagan, Marilyn Friedman, Jean Grimshaw, Virginia Held, Kathryn Jackson, Alison Jaggar, Nel Noddings, Bill Puka, Sara Ruddick, Joan C. Tronto and Margaret Walker.⁷

Despite the widespread, interdisciplinary influence of Gilligan's work, some feminists began by the mid 1980s to raise criticisms of care ethics and of Gilligan's arguments for a distinctively female moral orientation. Several objections are noteworthy here. First, the empirical correlation between

gender and moral perspective was not uniform and the data themselves were open to various interpretations. Some feminists suggested detaching Gilligan's (apparent) claim of a gender difference from her claim about the distinction between justice and care perspectives, and evaluating each claim separately.

Second, women's orientation toward care and personal relationships seemed mainly to reflect the social role of the traditional, full-time heterosexual wife and mother. (Certain female-oriented professions, such as nursing, exhibit a caring focus, but Gilligan's discussion of it did not draw on specifically professional details.) This role, however, is morally problematic. Although it has brought satisfaction to many women, it limits women's lives in important ways. It requires female heterosexuality, promotes women's dependence on men and consequent economic and social vulnerability, and submerges women's own desires and aspirations in the moral project of caring endlessly for others. Few would disagree with Gilligan that a care orientation reflects women's traditional role experiences. The dispute is over how to evaluate the resulting orientation. The fact that a moral orientation reflects women's experiences and standpoints is not in itself a reason to think that it is superior to all others or even sound in its own right. A relational care perspective might well be limited and flawed by the oppressive aspects of the role experiences that produced it.⁸

A third objection is that the empirical research underlying Gilligan's discussion of care ethics was based only on white, middle-class, heterosexual women, and her writings did not acknowledge that differences among women might make a difference to their moral perspectives. It is an open question whether a care ethics would emerge in the perspectives of lesbians, black women, poor women, or any others who diverge in important ways from Gilligan's research sample.⁹ In the 1980s, many feminists grew resistant to generalizations that purported to represent 'women' without qualification. Concern to articulate differences among women due to such factors as sexual orientation, race, class, religion, ethnicity, nationality, age and ableness became a major feminist theme. If moral orientation is linked to significant life experiences and if life experiences vary in tandem with these other factors, then we might well need lesbian ethics, black womanist ethics and so on.¹⁰ Thus, where Gilligan initially referred to only two moral orientations, care and justice, some feminists now began to talk about a multiplicity of perspectives among women.

To summarize: feminist ethics shares the general feminist goal of eliminating the subordination and oppression of women and enhancing

societal respect for women's viewpoints and capacities. Toward this end, feminist ethics adopts a number of diverse methodological strategies, including the defence of theories and concepts that seem more compatible with women's modes of reflection and understanding than do those of mainstream ethics. Some of these strategies were developing simultaneously for non-feminist reasons in mainstream philosophical ethics. These coincident strategies include: a search for alternatives to Kantian and utilitarian ethics, legitimation of the personal point of view, defence of the role of emotion in moral judgment and development of a relationally oriented moral psychology.

Other strategies of feminist ethics are distinctive to it. One such strategy is broadly critical: to expose and to challenge male-oriented biases in traditional and contemporary mainstream work, especially attitudes that would justify or excuse the subordination of women. Such attitudes include derogatory assumptions about women,¹¹ a preoccupation with moral problems arising in typically male experiences,¹² and (in the view of many feminist theorists) individualistic approaches to moral theory.¹³ Many feminists also see male bias in claims to universality and impartiality that are frequently made by mainstream ethical theorists on behalf of their favoured theories. The feminists' objection is that merely parochial notions – in particular, male moral notions – masquerade as unbiased moral universals.

A second distinctive strategy of feminist ethics is to emphasize the interconnections between the political and the personal, or the public and the private – or to reject these distinctions entirely. A third distinctive strategy is to develop moral concepts, theories and methodologies that incorporate the moral perspectives and understandings of (diverse) women. Without claiming to 'universalize' over all women, feminists nevertheless tend to treat a relational orientation and a defence of emotion as epitomes of female moral concern, regardless of differences among women. Feminists tend in general to seek relational reconceptions of major moral ideals and concepts. Fourth, feminist ethics aims to incorporate into our moral understandings, where appropriate, a recognition of diversities among women grounded in such differences as sexual orientation, race, class, religion, ethnicity, nationality, age and ableness.

Some of these strategies are exemplified in feminist discussions of autonomy. To that topic I now turn.

Moral autonomy

The word 'autonomy' has etymological roots in the idea of self-government or self-determination, an idea that philosophers have explicated in a variety

of ways. Roughly and generally speaking, an autonomous person behaves and lives her life in accordance with values and commitments that are, in some important sense, her own. Many philosophers take moral autonomy, that is, self-determination in moral understanding and decision-making, to be a precondition of moral agency and responsibility.

The concept of moral autonomy was a cornerstone of Kant's (1724-1804) moral philosophy and is most often associated today with Kantian ethical traditions.¹⁴ On Kant's view, moral autonomy is the foundation of moral agency. The morally autonomous person does not merely follow either the teachings of moral traditions or his own desires or inclinations. Instead, he (and for Kant, 'he' is always a *he*¹⁵) uses his capacity for rationality to apprehend the moral law, and he obeys it from no cause except his rational respect for the moral law as such. He becomes, in so doing, morally self-legislative or morally autonomous.

On the Kantian view, generalized maxims are not matters of morality unless they have the form of universal and categorically necessary laws. The morally autonomous person is one who grasps the categorical necessity of universal moral law, and who attempts to act accordingly. Categorically necessary universal laws are only comprehensible through reason. Emotion, desire, and inclination in general are not capable of generating insight into moral law because they are contingent, and lack universality. The morally self-determining person gives himself the moral law by apprehending it as universal and as categorically necessary. The rational standpoint he adopts is impartial inasmuch as it is not governed by any of the contingencies that define the moral reasoner (or any other person) as a particular empirical being in the world.

The reasons, stated earlier, which have led feminists to embrace care ethics have served for them also as reasons for rejecting the Kantian approach to moral autonomy. Feminists have argued that the Kantian approach must be rejected if ethical theory is to recognize the moral importance of emotions, close personal relationships, social relationships generally, and the non-impartial nature of any actual ethical standpoint.

Impartialist normative theories have often preoccupied themselves with the public realm and the moral concerns of citizens who meet each other as mutually disinterested but co-equal strangers. Focusing as they have on matters of justice and rights, Kantian theories of moral autonomy have tended to neglect matters of care and close personal relationships. Construing reason as the route to moral autonomy, Kantian accounts allow no place for emotion as a legitimate ingredient of moral understanding. Yet a moral agent surely understands herself and her situation in part by grasping the significance of her own emotional reactions. Also she may come to

understand how it is with others by first empathizing with them in reaction to their plights. If we lacked the resources for emotional sensitivity to the feelings and attitudes of other persons, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for us to develop deep concern for their moral situations.¹⁶

Kant's account neglects also the interpersonal nature of moral reasoning. Moral understanding, like any sort of human understanding, is an enterprise undertaken jointly by communities of individuals who communicate with each other and share social practices. Rather than being the isolated achievement suggested by Kant's original account, moral reasoning is thus grounded in social life.¹⁷ And the reasoning in which it is based is not the impartial reasoning of Kantian moral autonomy. Reasoning is situated in the lives of embodied and socially located persons. One's reasoning habits and capacities are shaped by one's experiences. Since there is no 'view from nowhere'¹⁸ that persons can adopt, it is quite implausible that any moral agent should reason in detachment from the empirical contingencies that make her the particular person she is.¹⁹

It may now have come to seem that feminists, who defend women's moral perspectives, must reject the notion of moral autonomy wholesale. A different reaction to these criticisms of the Kantian account is possible, however. Philosophers considering moral autonomy have focused almost exclusively on Kant's specific conception of it, an understandable emphasis given that the Kantian ethical tradition has given the ideal its fullest formulation.²⁰ But there seems to be a valuable core idea of moral self-determination that feminist criticisms leave untouched. If we wish to retain this core meaning of the ideal of self-determination, then we must find a different account, one which is both more plausible than Kant's theory and more congenial to feminist concerns. This is the project to which I now turn.

Toward a feminist conception of autonomy

The core idea of moral autonomy is simply the notion of *behaving according to norms or ideals that, given one's social nature, one has determined for oneself to be justified as moral guidelines*. This conception acknowledges, though it does not specify the nature of, human interconnection and its relevance to autonomy. Furthermore, it does not construe reason as the exclusive source of moral autonomy; emotional understanding may contribute to a moral agent's choice of moral guidelines. The core idea, in addition, does not require impartiality in the form of reasoning detached from the empirical contingencies of a particular person's identity or life.²¹ It is also not limited in application to the public realm; close

personal relationships may belong in the realm of life in which a moral agent exercises her understanding about how to live.

There are good reasons for thinking that this core notion of moral self-determination should appeal to feminists. The oppression of women has often denied them the opportunities to shape morally significant features of their lives in accordance with their own reflective considerations about how best to live – considerations grounded in an understanding of their own needs and values. As subordinates in nearly all social institutions, women's own points of view about important cultural matters have been historically disregarded and systematically suppressed. Even in the domestic realm, which has traditionally been the domain of women, women have been subordinated to male authority and expected to centre their lives around the needs and concerns of particular others to whom they were related. Sandra Bartky argues that the emotional nurturance and ego support that women have traditionally been expected to provide for men promotes in women a tendency to identify with the standpoint of their beloveds and to suspend their own independent moral evaluation.²²

According to Jérôme Schneewind, Kant's conception of autonomy was the revolutionary culmination of modern moral philosophy's developing conception of morality as self-governance, an idea which replaced the earlier western conception of morality as obedience.²³ Moralities of obedience hold, among other things, that people are not equal to each other in the capacity to grasp what morality requires. In order to lead moral lives, therefore, most people need to obey those few other persons who do understand the requirements of morality. Modern moral philosophy, in direct repudiation of this idea, developed the abstract notion that all persons are equally capable of understanding what morality calls for and of being motivated to act accordingly. This idea depended in turn on the development of a moral psychology that treated persons as individually competent in capacities of moral discernment and motivation. Kantian moral philosophy was a revolutionary culmination to this historical trend toward according substantially more abstract moral respect to individual persons.²⁴

For most of the modern period, however, only men benefited from this development – and only some men, at that. While more and more men were coming to be recognized as competent moral agents, women tended to remain morally subordinated in practice to the authority and control of their fathers, husbands, priests and governors. It was not until the twentieth century that women in substantial numbers across a wide social spectrum were allowed to exercise their moral agency in a variety of social contexts. Even so, major religions and most human societies fall short to some degree

or other in acknowledging women's full moral equality with men as moral agents who are competent to participate in the whole range of human activities and social institutions.²⁵ Thus the conception of morality as self-governance has never been applied as fully to women as it has been to men.

Many feminists have argued that the problem with modern moral philosophies such as that of Kant goes beyond the mere fact that men were the main beneficiaries of the theories. Those philosophies are alleged to be deeply masculinist in their very conceptions and values, as evidenced, for example, by their neglect of the social nature of moral understanding.²⁶ This view of modern moral philosophies, however, is not the only critical line open to feminists. It is crucial for feminist thinking in general to challenge the cultural remnants of the conception of morality as obedience, as applied to women. This requires challenging the idea that women *as individuals* are less capable than men as individuals of grasping what morality requires and being motivated to act accordingly. Toward this end, it seems necessary to insist that women harbour, as individuals, the ability to attain competence as moral agents without having to be dominated or controlled by others. A focus on individual moral capacity, as in the Kantian tradition, seems required by any ethical perspective that aims to challenge the conception of morality as obedience or the application of such a conception to women.

The social conception of moral understanding, however plausible it may be from a feminist standpoint, by itself provides no reason to reject the dangerous conception of morality as obedience. It provides no reason to think that persons should contribute *equally* to the moral enterprise. Hierarchies of knowledge and authority characterize most social undertakings; some individuals acquire a greater share than others of the knowledge generated by the group's endeavours. Most people think that greater knowledge justifies the exercise of greater authority and command in joint endeavours. Thus social conceptions of moral understanding do not preclude the idea that some persons should be ruled morally by others, in particular, those others whose moral knowledge is greater. Nor do they rule out the idea that greater moral knowledge will reside in men, who should, therefore, control women in various moral matters. For this reason, a social conception of moral understanding that neglects (women's) individual moral competence cannot by itself serve the feminist goal of ending women's moral subordination to men.

Too much attention to the social nature of the moral enterprise, especially when conjoined with the idea that women are much more relationally oriented than men within this enterprise, can make it seem as if women were especially incapable *as individuals* of grasping what morality

requires and acting accordingly. This social emphasis can cast doubt on women's ability to make moral decisions when alone or to resist the sway of morally misguided communities. In order to challenge the formidable structures of male domination that remain in this world, it is crucial for feminism to insist that mature women are as capable as men of being full moral agents in their own rights and should no more be dominated or controlled over the course of their adult lives than men are.

Towards this end, a feminist ethics should stress more than merely the social nature of moral autonomy. It should stress in addition that the moral capacities of women *as individuals* are at least equal to those of men as individuals. This approach does not rule out the thesis that individual moral competence is a social product. Moral competence emerges from prior socialization and depends for its manifestation on ongoing shared cultural resources for moral meaning and communication. Within the context of a moral enterprise that is necessarily a social project, however, women are at least as capable as men of determining *individually* what morality requires and of being *individually* self-governing.

Personal autonomy

Having seen the importance for feminism of reconceptualizing moral autonomy, we should explore a more general notion of autonomy to which feminists have attended. Here the special requirements of the moral realm need not be in question. Whereas we defined moral autonomy as self-determination in moral understanding and choice, *personal*, or individual, autonomy may be defined as self-determination in the quite general sense of choosing how to act and to live one's own life.

Feminist attitudes toward personal autonomy have changed over the years. In the 1970s, the ideal of autonomy itself was not problematized. Feminists believed instead that personal autonomy was a desirable trait for women, one which could enable them to resist oppression and live fulfilling lives. The main feminist concern then was that processes of gender socialization and political suppression had unfairly denied autonomy to women. Larry Blum, et al., Sharon Bishop Hill and, more recently, Diana T. Meyers all made this case.²⁷

In the 1980s, however, feminists began objecting to the very ideal of autonomy as it was understood in the philosophical mainstream. One criticism is that mainstream philosophical conceptions of autonomy rely on an unrealistic psychology of the person. Most mainstream theories of autonomy make some mode of accurate self-reflection and self-endorsement crucial to the realization of autonomy, thereby assuming that veridical

self-awareness is an easy achievement and that self-deception is not a serious problem. Feminists argue in contrast that veridical self-understanding is a rare achievement that should not be taken for granted. As Jean Grimshaw suggests, accounts of autonomy that do not acknowledge the difficulties of knowing one's own desires and that give no suggestions about overcoming these difficulties are seriously incomplete and misleading.²⁸

Perhaps the single most important feminist objection to mainstream accounts is their overly individualistic character. The ideal of autonomy is closely allied with liberal traditions of moral and political thought. According to the feminist critique, such traditions conceive of individuals as social atoms who realize autonomy through independent self-sufficiency and self-creation in selfish detachment from human connection. Feminists have charged these theories with treating social relationships and interdependencies simply as threats to autonomy.²⁹

An atomistic account of persons and personal autonomy is indeed implausible. Individuals do not create themselves; there are no literal 'self-made men'. All human beings must be raised and socialized by other human beings in order to survive and lead distinctively human lives. Most human beings remain dependent on others in at least some ways over the whole course of their lives. Even the rare individuals who can survive for long periods of time without any human companionship nevertheless had to have previously learned skills of survival from other persons. Furthermore, the process of socialization incorporates cultural resources such as language, modes of thinking and practical habits into the very identity and consciousness of persons. In addition, awareness of oneself as a self and the related capacity for self-reflection require a context of other selves from whom one learns to differentiate oneself both numerically and qualitatively. Finally, shared social concepts and norms inform and make meaningful the choices and commitments by way of which individual autonomy is realized. Thus, rather than threatening autonomy, social relationships and human interdependencies are necessary for its realization.

In place of atomistic accounts of autonomy, feminists recommend either abandoning the ideal of autonomy altogether or modifying the account to acknowledge the social nature of persons and their modes of self-determination.³⁰ The standard current feminist account of autonomy may be called a social or relational account. Variants have been developed by many feminist philosophers, including Evelyn Fox Keller, Jennifer Nedelsky, Seyla Benhabib, Lorraine Code, Morwenna Griffiths, Alison Weir and Susan Brison.³¹ The accounts put forward by these theorists make two crucial relational claims. First, the sort of self who could realize personal

autonomy is an inherently social being who becomes a distinct self with a particular identity only through interpersonal relationships with other persons. Second, autonomy requires capacities that must either be *learned* from others, such as self-understanding, questioning, doubting, or imagining alternatives, or that must be exercised in *interaction* with others, for example, the telling of narratives about oneself. These capacities are all additionally social in requiring meaningful systems of representation for understanding self and circumstances, systems that must be embedded in social practices.

Relational accounts of autonomy have a great deal of plausibility. Indeed, for some time now, many mainstream philosophers of autonomy have acknowledged both that only socialized beings can realize autonomy and that they must do so in virtue of processes that are grounded in social relationships and practices.³² In addition, no mainstream conception requires a person to choose detachment from others or self-sufficient independence in order to realize autonomy. A person can realize autonomy while remaining dependent on others, caring for them intensely, taking ample account of the needs and desires of loved ones, cooperating with others in collective endeavours, or, on some accounts, even subordinating herself to others. Someone can do these things autonomously, according to various mainstream accounts, so long as her choices to do so have been based on the right sort of self-reflection.³³

Since current mainstream philosophical accounts of autonomy acknowledge that social relationships ground personal autonomy, have feminist theorists of autonomy been wrong to criticize them? Perhaps. I suggest, however, that the appropriate target of feminist autonomy critiques is not mainstream philosophy but rather an ideal of *masculine* autonomy that pervades the popular cultures of many societies. In the western societies that idealize autonomy, men are idealized for being self-sufficient, substantively independent, and avoiding financial or emotional dependence on others. Ordinary norms of masculinity laud traits and behaviours that amount to an ideal of substantive independence, an ideal that is not procedurally neutral at all. This model of (male) autonomy manifests the atomistic individualism that feminists have criticized.

Mainstream philosophical accounts of autonomy have little to say about what is wrong with those popular masculine ideals. They simply ignore the ideals that shape the popular understanding of autonomy. Unfortunately, to disregard those ideals is to ignore how conceptions of gender bear on, and distort, that popular understanding. By neglecting these cultural gender ideals, mainstream philosophical approaches to autonomy thus overlook the practices that shape how real women and men understand and strive

for personal autonomy. They disregard the ways in which the actual pursuit of autonomy falls short of philosophical ideals due to the influence of gender practices. Feminist approaches to autonomy are precisely aimed at remedying this deficit. Feminist theories of autonomy thus embody a dimension of social awareness and commentary that is lacking in most mainstream philosophical approaches.

At least two challenges now face feminist relational accounts of autonomy. First, social relationships are not always benign in their effects on women. In intimate, sexual and familial relationships, for example, women have historically been subjected to economic control, hierarchical subordination, rape and domestic violence with the indifference, if not the blessing, of churches and states. As a result, women have suffered in many ways from social relationships, including the denial of whatever degree of personal autonomy might otherwise have been theirs.

Consider the abuse of women by their husbands or other intimate partners. Such abuse threatens the victim's security in her own home. Instead of being able to focus autonomously on living a life that accords with her deepest values and commitments, she is forced to concentrate all her attention on survival and safety. These survival needs, in turn, direct her attention to the desires and demands of her abuser. An abused woman tends to develop a heightened awareness of what her partner wants and needs in order to accommodate his wishes and whims, all in the attempt to minimize his violent reactions.³⁴ Having to let the needs and desires of another person determine the course of one's behaviour in order to survive is a tragically heteronomous mode of existence.

Feminist research into the violence and the violations that social relationships sometimes inflict on women is thus strikingly relevant to feminist accounts of autonomy. Feminist writings on autonomy from the 1980s onward already acknowledge that social relationships are both necessary for yet sometimes barriers to autonomy.³⁵ The theoretical problem now is to give each of these contrasting theses their due and to make them cohere.

A second challenge for feminist relational accounts of autonomy is to reconceptualize the nature of selfhood and individuality³⁶ in a coherent manner. In particular this calls for eliminating the possible tensions between two views, first, that personhood is inherently social and, second, that autonomy requires a significant degree of separate personhood. To *determine* its self, a being must, at the very least, *be* a self. Selves must, for example, be numerically distinct from other beings and separately identifiable as actors, agents, or authors of choice and behaviour in the world. A self must have some degree of coherent unity as a separate self and be capable of some degree of reliable self-reflection. These seem to be the

minimal conditions necessary for the sort of selfhood that enables a being to be capable of realizing autonomy, however much that autonomy cannot be realized except in a context of social relationships.

Postmodernism, deconstructionism, psychoanalysis and other movements in contemporary philosophy have challenged in various ways the concept of the unified, coherent, self-conscious self. Substantial segments of feminist philosophy have been influenced by these intellectual movements. Some feminist philosophers have accordingly rejected the view that human beings are unified, coherent, or reliably self-aware.³⁷ Needless to say, feminists of this persuasion will have little interest in the concept of autonomy.

Unity, coherence and self-consciousness, however, are matters of degree. A subject need not be absolutely unified, coherent, or transparently and incorrigibly self-aware in order to exercise autonomy; she need merely have those traits to a sufficient degree. Nothing about feminism in itself necessitates rejection of the idea that selves have some minimal degree of unity, coherence, reliable self-awareness, or differentiation from others. Feminist explorations of the concept of autonomy can help to articulate the nature of this minimally distinct and coherent self – and to determine the complex ways in which social relationships bear on its prospects for autonomy.³⁸

NOTES

- 1 A representative collection of sources from the late 1970s is Laura Lederer, ed., *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1980). See also Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).
- 2 See especially Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); and Carol Gilligan, 'Moral Orientation and Moral Development', in Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds., *Women and Moral Theory* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987), pp. 19–33.
- 3 A book that had wide interdisciplinary influence is Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); see also Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976).
- 4 See, for example, Linda Alcoff, 'Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 13:3 (1988), 405–36.
- 5 J. Gray, *Men Are from Mars; Women Are from Venus* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).
- 6 Cf. Bernard Williams, 'Morality and the Emotions', in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

- 7 Papers on care ethics by Annette Baier, Seyla Benhabib, Lawrence Blum, Claudia Card, Owen Flanagan, Marilyn Friedman, Virginia Held, Kathryn Jackson, Alison Jaggar, Bill Puka, Joan Tronto, Margaret Walker and others can be found in the following excellent collections on care ethics: Eva F. Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds., *Women and Moral Theory*; Mary Jeanne Larrabee, ed., *An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Virginia Held, ed., *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).
- 8 Authored books devoted entirely or in substantial part to discussing care ethics include: Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Jean Grimshaw, *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Marilyn Friedman, *What Are Friends For? Feminist Perspectives on Personal Relationships and Moral Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Susan Hekman, *Moral Voices, Moral Selves: Carol Gilligan and Feminist Moral Theory* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).
- 9 See, for example, Card, 'Gender and Moral Luck', in Held, ed., *Justice and Care*, pp. 79–98; and Barbara Houston, 'Rescuing Womanly Virtues: Some Dangers of Moral Reclamation', in Marsha Hanen and Kai Nielsen, eds., *Science, Morality and Feminist Theory*, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, supplementary volume 13 (1987), 237–62.
- 10 Michele M. Moody-Adams, 'Gender and the Complexity of Moral Voices', in Claudia Card, ed., *Feminist Ethics* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1991), pp. 195–212.
- 11 On lesbian ethics, see Sarah Lucia Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value* (Palo Alto, CA: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988); and Claudia Card, *Lesbian Choices* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). The term 'womanist' is Alice Walker's alternative to 'feminist'; see Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983). On ethical perspectives reflecting black women's experiences, see also Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991); bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981); and bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989).
- 12 Aristotle, for example, believed that women lacked the authority of reason that men could attain; Kant believed that women were incapable of the kind of principled thinking that is the mark of rational autonomy. For excerpts from the classics of the western philosophical tradition that express these and other derogatory views of women, see Martha Lee Osborne, ed., *Woman in Western Thought* (New York: Random House, 1979).
- 13 J. O. Urnson, for example, counts soldiers who fall on live grenades to save their comrades as paradigm examples of heroes while dismissing 'the sacrifice made by a mother for her child' as merely an instance of 'natural affection' that

- does not 'fall under the concept of morality' at all; see his 'Saints and Heroes', in Joel Feinberg, ed., *Moral Concepts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 62-3. In general, most philosophers until recently had neglected the morality of family life and intimate relationships in favour of the public morality of the workplace and polis.
- 13 Concepts of autonomy, impartiality, rights, liberty and social contract can be interpreted in ways that presuppose highly separate individual selves who lack mutual concern and deep interpersonal attachment. These charges have been levelled, for example, against John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), both from a non-feminist perspective (Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)) and from a feminist perspective (Seyla Benhabib, 'The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy and Moral Theory', *Situating the Self*, pp. 148-77).
 - 14 See, for example, Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981).
 - 15 See, for example, the excerpt from Kant's 'Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime', in Osborne, ed., *Women in Western Thought*, pp. 154-61.
 - 16 See, however, John Christman, 'Feminism and Autonomy', in Dana E. Bushnell, ed., *Nagging Questions: Feminist Ethics in Everyday Life* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), pp. 24-7, who argues that the Kantian conception of moral autonomy can accommodate emotionality.
 - 17 Barbara Herman argues that before one can apply the Categorical Imperative to a situation, one must regard that situation as having morally significant features. On Herman's view, one attains such a grasp in virtue of 'rules of moral salience' which 'structure an agent's perception of his situation so that what he perceives is a world with moral features'. Most importantly, these rules are 'elements in a moral education'; they are, on Herman's view, *acquired from others*. Herman's moral theory thus takes account of the social context underlying human moral understanding while remaining decidedly Kantian. See Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 77.
 - 18 The phrase comes from Thomas Nagel's *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
 - 19 See, for example, Friedman, *What Are Friends For?*, ch. 1; and Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), ch. 4.
 - 20 A few feminists have discussed concepts of moral autonomy that were developed outside the Kantian tradition. See, for example, Lynne Arnault, 'The Radical Future of a Classic Moral Theory', in Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo, eds., *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 188-206.
 - 21 Feminists do not need to give up the ideal of impartiality altogether. Impartiality is a crucial feature of the justification of moral norms. Moral norms are justifiable for a community only if they are acceptable from a standpoint which does not privilege the interests of certain individuals or groups over those of other individuals or groups. The problem is that due to the finite and partial nature of individual human psychology, there is no guarantee that any one individual's reasoning can embody this sort of personal detachment.
- The interactive dialogue of a group, however, can help to overcome individual biases. If each party is equally capable of representing her own standpoint, then the group's dialogue as a whole embodies consideration for the interests of each party. Those who might be the victims of the biases of some participants can reject the moral reasoning that disadvantages them for another's benefit. On this view, impartiality is construed specifically as the absence of bias, and a social process, namely dialogue, becomes the method for best ensuring its realization in human moral reasoning. This approach to impartiality indirectly reinforces the feminist call for a social or interpersonal approach to autonomy. For a greater elaboration of this argument, see my *What Are Friends For?*, ch. 1.
 - 22 Sandra Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990), ch. 7.
 - 23 Jerome Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
 - 24 In practice, of course, some groups of men - and all women - were long denied their due in the growing trend toward allowing individuals the liberty to live their moral lives as they saw fit.
 - 25 The Southern Baptist Church, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, recently altered its key confessional document, 'The Baptist Faith and Message', to assert the principle that women should 'submit graciously' to their husbands, justifying this dictum on biblical grounds; 'Southern Baptists Call for Wives to Be Submissive', *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 10 June 1998, pp. A1, 9.
 - 26 See, for example, Susan J. Hekman; *Moral Voices, Moral Selves: Carol Gilligan and Feminist Moral Theory* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), esp. ch. 2 and pp. 72-6.
 - 27 Larry Blum, Marcia Homiak, Judy Housman and Naomi Scheman, 'Altruism and Women's Oppression', *The Philosophical Forum* 5:1-2 (Fall-Winter 1973-74), 196-221; Sharon Bishop Hill, 'Self-Determination and Autonomy', in Richard Wasserstrom, ed., *Today's Moral Problems*, 2nd edition (New York: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 118-33; and Diana T. Meyers, *Self, Society, and Personal Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
 - 28 Jean Grimshaw, 'Autonomy and Identity in Feminist Thinking', in Morwenna Griffiths and Margaret Whitford, eds., *Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 90-108.
 - 29 See, for example, Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections of Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Jennifer Nedelsky, 'Reconceiving Autonomy: Sources, Thoughts and Possibilities', *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 1:1 (Spring 1989), 7-36; Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); and Morwenna Griffiths, *Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1995).
 - 30 Defenders of the liberal tradition deny that it holds such atomistic or individualistic conceptions; see for example Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), ch. 1. More in the text below on how mainstream conceptions of autonomy in general have converged with those of feminism on this point.

- 31 See, for example, Keller, *Reflections of Gender and Science*; Nedelsky, 'Reconceiving Autonomy'; Benhabib, *Situating the Self*; Code, *What Can She Know?*; Griffiths, *Feminisms and the Self*; Alison Weir, *Sacrificial Logics: Feminist Theory and the Critique of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and Susan Brison, 'Outliving Oneself: Trauma, Memory, and Personal Identity', in Meyers, ed., *Feminists Rethink the Self*, pp. 12–39.
- 32 For a discussion of how mainstream conceptions of autonomy acknowledge the social nature of autonomy, thus concurring with feminist accounts, see my 'Autonomy and Social Relationships: Rethinking the Feminist Critique', in Meyers, ed., *Feminists Rethink the Self*, pp. 40–61.
- 33 One mainstream account that exemplifies this approach is that of Gerald Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For a discussion of how contemporary accounts of autonomy are consistent with feminist concerns, see Christman, 'Feminism and Autonomy'.
- 34 See, for example, Kathleen J. Ferraro, 'Battered Women: Strategies for Survival', in Albert P. Cardarelli, ed., *Violence Between Intimate Partners: Patterns, Causes, and Effects* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), pp. 124–40, esp. pp. 128–9.
- 35 See, for example, Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, pp. 112–13; Nedelsky, 'Reconceiving Autonomy', pp. 21, 33–4; and Code, 'Second Persons', pp. 87–94, 108. See also my 'Autonomy, Social Disruption, and Women', in Natalie Stoljar and Catriona Mackenzie, eds., *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
- 36 See, for example, Meyers, ed., *Feminists Rethink the Self*.
- 37 Judith Butler makes this case specifically in regard to gender identity; cf. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
- 38 See, for example, Stoljar and Mackenzie, eds., *Relational Autonomy*.

I2

ALISON JAGGAR

Feminism in ethics
Moral justification

The philosophical question of moral justification inquires how substantive moral assertions – claims that particular actions or practices are right or wrong, permissible or impermissible – may be confirmed or disconfirmed. This question has always been central in western moral philosophy and it holds special significance for feminism, which is defined by its moral opposition to male dominance. Feminists need some means of establishing that their critiques of those actions, practices and institutions that rationalize or maintain male dominance are not merely personal opinions but instead are objectively justified.

This chapter discusses some recent feminist contributions to the philosophical debate about moral justification. Part 1 traces feminist engagements with four major moral theorists of the twentieth century, and part 2 makes explicit several common themes running through those feminist critiques. Part 3 outlines some elements of an alternative feminist approach to moral justification, informed by the earlier critiques. Part 4 offers some feminist reflections on the project of providing a philosophical account of moral justification, suggesting that philosophers' claims to authority in defining moral justification may themselves constitute practice of dominance.

1 Feminist challenges to the analytic canon

Intuitionism: Elizabeth Anderson on G. E. Moore

Analytic ethics is often said to begin in 1903 with the publication of G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*. Moore is credited with being the father of the linguistic turn in moral philosophy, directing philosophical attention away from explicit consideration of normative issues and refocusing it on the analysis of moral language. Moore's best-known contribution to ethics is his analysis of what he took to be its central concept, namely, the concept