

**LIFTING VEILS OF IGNORANCE**

**P**hilosophy, like art and religion, offers a kind of salvation. It can remove us from the stress of material life and give us the heart to go on. Yet philosophy is not done in a material vacuum. It involves an apprenticeship of study with time off from other labor and builds on prior generations' work, preserved in archives. European philosophy and its descendants have been for two and a half millennia the province of relatively leisured men who trace their intellectual heritage to free men of ancient Greece. Although Plato admitted a few women to his Academy, it has been for most of recorded history socially privileged men who were apprenticed as philosophers and whose work fills the archives.

Before the twentieth century the most significant transitions in the development of European philosophy were its movements between religious and secular homes, its coming under the dominance of Christianity for centuries, when much ancient philosophical work was preserved from destruction by Muslims and Jews, and then its breaking relatively free of religious dominance and protection in the early modern period. These transitions showed in the topics explored, who became apprenticed as philosophers, for which audiences they wrote, styles as well as contents of their critiques, and which points of view were represented in their writings.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the most significant transitions in the descendants of European philosophy may come from the increasing access to academic education of people with social histories of disempowerment: the working classes, Jews, people of color with histories of oppression in white societies, women of all classes and ethnic backgrounds, people with disabilities, people living openly lesbian or gay lives. Many from these groups do not always (or only) trace their intellectual heritages to men of ancient Greece. As with earlier transitions, the transition to this multifaceted pluralism can be expected to

show in the kinds of topics to which philosophers attend, the audiences for whom we write, the styles as well as contents of our philosophical critiques, the points of view we represent.

Among the welcome differences such changes could make in philosophical ethics is an increased appreciation of the roles of luck in who we are and who we can become, in the good lives available to us and the evils we may be liable to embody. For, luck is often best appreciated by those who have known relatively *bad* luck and have been unable to escape steady comparison of their lot with those of others.

### *Moral Luck*

Luck found a place in the philosophical conversations of ethics in the mid-1970s. Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel's symposium "Moral Luck" (which introduced the term) attended to examples of individuals who took major risks with their lives, met with accidents, or suffered reversals of political fortune.<sup>1</sup> In the 1980s Martha Nussbaum explored connections between luck and ethics in Greek tragedy, and the coherence of the concept of moral luck was given yet further support in essays by Margaret Walker.<sup>2</sup> It was oftener challenged, however, in the journals, where the question whether moral luck is a coherent concept has been a subject of dispute.<sup>3</sup>

"Moral luck" refers to such facts as that how we become good or bad, how good or bad we become, and whether some of our choices turn out to have been justified are matters into which luck enters substantially. Some of these facts seem mundane. Yet controversies arise over what they imply. Chapter Two defends moral responsibility against the skepticisms of Williams and Nagel, with special attention to contexts of oppression and abuse. The idea of responsibility, especially of taking responsibility, is a continuing theme in ensuing chapters.

Williams calls the luck that enters into character development "*constitutive* moral luck" and that which enters into the justifiability of particular choices "*incident* moral luck." Disputes in the journals about the conceptual coherence of moral luck have fastened primarily on incident luck, the luck of particular choices, largely ignoring constitutive luck. Like the luck with which Martha Nussbaum and Margaret Walker have been primarily concerned, however, the luck with which this book is concerned is often constitutive luck, the luck of character

development. I tend to find incident luck of interest for its impact on character.

In the history of philosophical ethics, the view that character development is significantly influenced by luck was appreciated more by Aristotle than by Immanuel Kant. For Aristotle, the good life was a happy one. This meant that it was, among other things, a fortunate life. Happiness is to be prized, not praised. But Aristotle's happy life was also a life that was lived in accord with virtues, for which we are praised. Aristotle acknowledged that happiness depends at least modestly on the cooperation of "externals," such things as good birth, good health, and good looks.<sup>4</sup> This observation could mean simply that living in accord with the virtues is not enough to make us happy, that our virtuous choices need to be supplemented with external goods. Alternatively, it could mean that in order to live a life in accord with the virtues, we need at least the modest cooperation of externals, things beyond our control. Both readings are plausible, and both are suggested by Aristotle's remarks. The view that acquisition of the virtues depends in part on externals, however, implies constitutive moral luck. For eventually, we come to externals over which we have no control, and over which we could not even conceivably have control, such as the circumstances of our birth and our early childhoods.

In modern philosophy, Kant's position has had greater influence than Aristotle's. The position of Kant—no aristocrat—has been especially attractive to democrats and egalitarians because it holds that good moral character, as a sense of duty, is accessible to everyone. Kant presents that accessibility as the ground of human dignity.<sup>5</sup> Persons, as rational beings, have an absolute value, he maintains, because we give ourselves a moral law from which we can determine our duties, and he held that we can all act as duty requires, come what may. On this view, our goodness (or badness) is entirely up to us. However unlucky we may be, *we* still determine whether we meet the challenges life offers us well or poorly.

Like Aristotle, Williams, Nagel, and Martha Nussbaum have taken as paradigms of moral luck lives that began from a combination of generally privileged social positions. The more usual cases, however, are lives with beginnings that are relatively disadvantaged along significant dimensions, such as having a socially disvalued gender, race, ethnicity, or class, or a socially stigmatized disability, illness, deformity, or disorder. Being socially disadvantaged along one or more such dimensions is not

enough to make one disadvantaged on the whole, as disadvantages in one area may be compensated for by advantages in others. And often the nature of one's position may not be readily visible. Still, the dimensions of powerlessness take their toll. They impact the way we develop, as do our "closets" if we choose to "pass."

In this book, I take as my paradigms the luck of middle- and lower-class women who face violence and exploitation in misogynist and class-hierarchical societies, of lesbians who face continuing pressure to hide or self-destruct in societies hostile to same-sex intimate partnerships, of culturally christian white women who have ethnic and color-privilege in white christian and racist societies, and of adult survivors of childhood abuse. Many of the issues, however, have parallels or analogues in the cases of those socially disadvantaged or privileged in other ways.

Thus, I come closer to Kant's starting point than to Aristotle's, insofar as my paradigms are the ordinary lives of ordinary people, lives that are generally politically disadvantaged though sometimes also privileged in limited ways. Although I have been deeply affected by Kantian liberalism, I am skeptical of Kant's apparent assumption that the same basic character development is accessible to everyone. Even if his optimistic belief that everyone has opportunities to become good contains more truth than some would admit, I doubt that the opportunities are the same for everyone, that the level of difficulty is the same, and, consequently, that the goodness available to us is likely to take the same forms.

Circumstances of oppression can illustrate the point. Economically oppressive circumstances offer relatively little opportunity or encouragement to develop the virtue of liberality. Not only can oppression make certain virtues difficult to develop, but the question arises in view of the damaging nature of oppression whether those who are oppressed are moral agents at all. In feminist philosophy, this has complicated the question of how resistance by the oppressed is possible.<sup>6</sup> From where can the requisite strength of character and resourcefulness come? So let us turn briefly to the concept of oppression.

### *Oppression*

More than a decade ago Marilyn Frye called attention to patterns suggested by the etymological roots of "oppression": pressing against—reducing, molding, immobilizing.<sup>7</sup> Footbinding exempli-

fies all three. Less dramatically, contemporary middle-class and even working-class ideals of femininity in the United States also reduce female development and mold it as they constrain female motility—matters explored by Iris Young's discussion of "throwing like a girl."<sup>8</sup> On a larger scale Marilyn Frye notes that oppressive social institutions catch us in double-binds so that no matter what we do, it is wrong and we are wrong. This situation systematically undermines the development of self-respect.<sup>9</sup>

In *Justice and the Politics of Difference* Iris Young carries the analysis of oppression further by examining five of its "faces": exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence, suggesting that different "faces" come to the fore in different historical instances of oppression.<sup>10</sup> If exploitation and cultural imperialism are salient faces of slavery, marginalization and violence are often salient in anti-Semitism and in antilebian and antigay hostility. Power disadvantages take many forms, some more damaging than others, and the different forms may be interrelated in complex ways.

My awareness of oppression and how easily it can be hidden first took shape in regard to religion. During the 1960s when I taught philosophy of religion, I found that texts in that field often assumed that philosophy of religion was simply philosophy of Christianity. My research into Jewish history and religion revealed histories of oppression by Christians omitted not only from philosophy textbooks but from the entirety of my public education and from the educations of most of my students. In the processes of hiding and marginalizing, the textbooks and educational curricula were continuing the oppressive exclusionary histories that they failed to acknowledge.

By the mid-1970s I identified strongly with feminism in its radicallesbian, gynocentric incarnations. Many patterns salient in the oppressions of women and lesbians can be found in other dominated or oppressed groups as well, however. Consider, for example, Laurence Thomas's identification of patterns of evil in American slavery and the Nazi genocide.<sup>11</sup> Slavery and much of its subsequent legacy of racism illustrate oppression that has a salient face of exploitation. Anti-Semitism and the genocide for which it helped prepare the way illustrate oppression with the salient face of marginalization leading to concealment, eventually to elimination and obliteration. The exploitation and elimination (or marginalization) patterns exist in tension with each other, and there is overlap between oppressions characterized by

each. The European slave trade, for example, killed millions in the process of exploitation and in order to exploit others, and marginalization is a significant aspect of racism in the United States today, although it is (tautologically) less visible to whites than is racist violence. Exploitation is also among the patterns of anti-Semitism — Nazi doctors experimented on Jewish prisoners and European Christians relied on Jewish moneylenders — although marginalization and worse have sometimes been more salient faces of Jewish oppression. Under slavery, genocide was subsidiary to exploitation and threatened to undermine it, whereas in the Nazi genocide, exploitation was subsidiary to concealment and elimination and could threaten to undermine them also. The two patterns can also blend into each other in that, as Thomas argues, a people exploited as slaves for seven generations may be utterly decimated as a people with their own culture, language, social institutions, and so forth. At this point, exploitation assumes the face of genocide.

The basic patterns of exploitation and elimination (or concealment) are also discernible in other forms of racism and in the oppressions of women, of lesbians and gay men, of workers, and of those who are disabled. Many women, for example, are exploited for heterosexual and domestic service as wives and as caretakers of the young, the old, the sick, the disabled of both sexes. Lesbians and gay men, on the other hand, have been hidden or killed. Prostitutes have been exploited *and* either killed or led to premature deaths. Industrial workers, exploited for productive labor in capitalist societies, have also been led to premature deaths. Those with mental disorders, on the other hand, have been hidden in attics, basements, and “total” institutions, and, as is too often the case with the physically disabled, their talents allowed to go to waste or to atrophy.<sup>12</sup>

Exploitation is double-edged. To be useful to others, we must be encouraged to develop qualities that *can* also be turned to our own purposes. If our exploitation requires us to make judgments, we may develop critical skills that interfere with the tendency to identify with oppressors. Without the capacity for judgment, our utility is curtailed. Exploitation thus sets limits to the “reduction” aspect of oppression and provides a wedge for resistance. Yet, even in the worst of imaginable circumstances, people have resisted.

It may seem a priori that living constantly under the imminent threat of death would utterly destroy one's moral agency, or at least one's scruples. During my undergraduate days it was commonplace to hear

comparisons of Nazi concentration camps with Thomas Hobbes's state of nature in precisely this respect. And yet, Holocaust survivors' narratives reveal an enormous variety of responses to atrocities that exceeded Hobbes's worst nightmares. Simon Wiesenthal's memoir *The Sunflower*—with which I often begin my course in introductory ethics—narrates his encounters in a concentration camp where it never seems to occur to him to take anything but a moral approach to question after question about what to do and whether his choices were the right ones.<sup>13</sup> He did not find oppression an excuse, or even an occasion, for moral insensitivity.

Following the lead of Marxist philosophers who took up the perspectives of oppressed workers in the paid labor force, women in recent decades have created courses in feminist philosophy, attending to the narratives of women who have survived many forms of oppression. Feminists began reflecting philosophically on concepts previously ignored or treated flippantly, such as "gender," "lesbian," and "rape." In the 1980s feminist philosophy became more pluralistic, more attentive to the intersections of sex, race, and class, and more specific. In 1986 *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* became an independent journal, offering special issues in such areas as feminist ethics, feminist epistemology, or feminist philosophy of science.<sup>14</sup> These developments and others like them are bringing the data of histories of oppression into the mainstream of contemporary philosophy.

### *Feminist Ethics and an Overview*

Carol Gilligan's continuing articulation of the "different voice" of women, the best-known influence in the development of feminist ethics, has fostered and provoked a growing body of literature in and on "care ethics."<sup>15</sup> Care ethics emphasizes the importance of valuing and maintaining relationships of care and connection. Among the most troubling aspects of care ethics has been its potentiality to valorize one-sided caring relationships and abusive relationships and to neglect women's needs to learn self-defense and to set boundaries in the face of violence.<sup>16</sup> As with the voices of survivors of war atrocities, women's voices even in times of so-called peace present a variety of responses to the challenges of living under threats to life and limb. Judith Herman compares women who are vulnerable to domestic violence and rape

with men in combat in terms of the traumas they suffer.<sup>17</sup> These and interrelated topics are discussed in Chapters Three through Seven.

Chapter Three takes up the question whether virtues are gender related, with special attention to the work of Carol Gilligan. Here I argue that although domestic contexts may call for different moral sensitivities than the contexts of markets and governments, we also need to consider whether the sensitivities women have developed in domestic contexts are also responses to oppressive conditions. If so, some of what we hear in women's voices may be right for those conditions but not for better ones. It is also possible, however, that some of the responses we hear are not good even in oppressive conditions. Listening to women's voices with what Theodore Reik called "a third ear" can sometimes reveal moral damage, such as a misplaced sense of gratitude, as well as moral insights.<sup>18</sup> A challenge for feminist moral philosophers has been to distinguish the insights from the damage.

Chapter Four discusses limits of care ethics, with special attention to the work of Nel Noddings, who finds justice a relatively unhelpful concept for ethics.<sup>19</sup> This chapter argues that in two major areas care without justice is inadequate to respond to the dangers of certain evils. One area is our relationships to strangers. The other is relationships of intimacy. This chapter also argues, however, that theories of justice need a greater variety of paradigmatic evils than the economic ones that have dominated theorizing about justice in recent decades. In so arguing, I draw on Nel Noddings's more recent work on women and evil.<sup>20</sup>

Chapter Five analyzes rape as a "protection racket" and terrorist institution that sets a context for the social construction of female desires to ingratiate ourselves with men. In this context the abuse of women in heterosexual relationships is condoned, and the position of women is conducive to the development of misplaced gratitude for a male "protection" that is often little more than a withholding of abuse.<sup>21</sup> This chapter also takes up briefly the feminist antipornography campaign as aimed at combatting rape terrorism and argues against recent attempts to defend pornography by appeal to the liberalism of John Stuart Mill.

Chapter Six, for which Chapter Five sets a background, examines the concept of gratitude and its associated sense of obligation, with special attention to the paradoxical idea of a "debt of gratitude." Gratitude is supposed to be for something given freely, and yet if it was given freely,



how can it impose a debt? In unraveling this paradox, this chapter has an eye to distinguishing between well-placed and misplaced gratitude, and it has a longer-range objective of advancing the philosophy of friendship.

One route to working out from under the protection racket has been lesbianfeminism. In a misogynist society, women's need for protection is real. The trick has been to get it without supporting our continuing need for it. Lesbianism presents itself to many as a live option here. The question whether being lesbian is a matter of luck or choice is a continuing topic of discussion, which I examine at length elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> I see it as having elements of both. Chapter Seven takes up an ethical aspect of that question under the heading of responsibility, returning to some of the themes of Chapter Two, and argues that for purposes of taking responsibility, being lesbian is better conceived as an erotic orientation than as a sexual one.

Achievements similar to those of feminist philosophy characterize recent developments by philosophers of color in the United States. Within the past fifteen years, philosophers of color have produced substantial bodies of inquiry attending to political issues of race and ethnicity and taking up issues in ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics from the perspectives of people of color.<sup>23</sup> The Society for Blacks in Philosophy was established in the early 1980s, and the American Philosophical Association publishes a major newsletter, "Philosophy and the Black Experience."<sup>24</sup> Like feminist philosophy, with which it overlaps, this body of work is expanding philosophical agendas with issues that previously received scant attention, such as connections of "race" with such concepts as "nation."<sup>25</sup> Slavery, an institution for decades cited by moral philosophers as a test case for utilitarian ethics, is finally beginning to receive the systematic and detailed ethical examination that it deserves as a topic of moral concern in itself.<sup>26</sup>

In the spirit of acknowledging both that white is a color and that it has been socially privileged in the United States, the final chapter in this volume reflects on the interrelated concepts of "race" and "ethnicity" from my perspective as a white woman with Anglo-Saxon protestant and Celtic roots. This chapter reflects on moral stances toward such categories, on their meanings, and on ways in which being inside socially constructed ethnic and color categories becomes part of our moral luck.

In the balance of this introduction, I comment on two features of my

philosophical orientation that characterize this book and many other works in the recent, more pluralistic philosophical scene. They are *holism* and *historical particularism*. I turn first to particularism.

### ***Historical Particularism***

By "particularism" I understand approaches to philosophical issues that take explicitly as appropriate subjects of philosophical investigation, and as data for philosophical reflection, the experiences of and concepts articulated by *historically defined communities or groups*, rather than concepts or experiences that are presumed to be universal. Particularists may concentrate on a particular culture, for example, or a particular gender. Particularist projects do not pretend to be about the whole world, life, or even human nature in general, although they may turn out to have global significance. Nor do they pretend to be about some aspect of life, of the world, or of human nature that can be presumed even to *interest* everyone or to reflect everyone's experience (although, again, it is possible that they may).

"Particularism" so understood does not imply nominalism, the metaphysical view that only individuals (particulars) *exist*. Nominalists deny the reality of universals, such as justice or goodness, maintaining that although there are just acts and good things, justice and goodness are not also things in their own right. Historical particularists need take no stand on the reality or unreality of universals. Instead, as I understand it, historical particularism is a practical orientation in project definition and methodology. Practical—or methodological—particularism may be readily confused with nominalism. But a practical particularist need not be a nominalist. A methodological particularist can leave open metaphysical questions concerning the reality of universals, because the issue is over what is interesting and worthwhile, not over what exists.

The particularity of historically defined inquiries is not always obvious, however. In setting particularist projects, feminist philosophers often reflect on mundane distinctions that have not been part of the traditional philosophy curriculum—distinctions that mark gender, race, or social class, for example. Such reflection is easily seen as evincing an interest in *human nature*. For everyone is gendered and has ethnic roots, and everyone experiences the effects of social class. And it is true that some feminist philosophers *have* investigated gender as an

aspect of human nature. Alison Jaggar does this in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, although she is also deeply concerned with differences in the significance of gender for women and for men.<sup>27</sup> Yet others have been more interested in reflecting on specifically female experience than on gender as a category that applies to everybody. Marilyn Frye and Sarah Hoagland, for example, reflect specifically on the experience of women and lesbians.<sup>28</sup> In reflecting on female experience, we are self-conscious of our perspectives as female, not just human, and of the fact that we are not giving equal time to the perspectives of men.

Recently, the prospect of carrying self-consciousness of our specificity to its theoretical limits has raised troubling questions about the subject matter and the perspectives of its theorizers.<sup>29</sup> If the realization that there are no generic humans is what underlies one's focus on women or one's self-identification as a woman, the realization that there are no generic women soon may lead to a more specific identification, say, as a white woman. But as there are no generic white women, either, we may specify further, perhaps as a middle-class white lesbian. No matter how specific we get, there are always differences to be noted among the members of our categories. Carrying the tendency toward specificity to its theoretical limit would seem to require that we simply point to particulars, without categorizing at all. But then, how could we even talk about what moved us to point in the first place?

The perplexities of the tendency toward specificity are exacerbated by the realization that the social categories that we find interesting to explore are not static. What the category "woman" contains is not the same as the contents of its ancestor category, *wifman*, which at one time unambiguously designated a wife.<sup>30</sup> What "African American" refers to is not the same in the 1990s as it would have been in the 1890s (had that been the term in vogue), prior to many immigrations from the West Indies. Heraclitus (536–470 B.C.E.) insisted that changeability, rather than permanence, was the salient fact of reality, dramatizing this insight by insisting that he never stepped into the same river twice. Similarly impressed by social change, some lesbians today are skeptical of the identity "lesbian."<sup>31</sup>

Not only the contents of our categories but also our vocabularies change. Within my lifetime, U.S. citizens of African American descent have classified themselves or have been classified as Negroes, colored people, blacks, Afro-Americans, and African Americans.<sup>32</sup> Woman-loving women have called themselves lesbians, female homosexuals,

Sapphists, amazons, dykes, queers, and outlaws. Even the same term often has different shades of meaning and suggests different values in different cultural contexts.

With identity terms, we can be *very particular indeed* about what we want to be called. Particularizing seems to have no end. And as the above discussions suggest, particularity—or specificity—has degrees. “Woman” is more particular, or specific, than “human” but less specific than “lesbian.” It is only against a historical background of an alleged focus on “humans” that a focus on “women” could even be identified as “particularist.”

There is a companion phenomenon of particularist audience. Feminist philosophy is often addressed specifically to women (although not necessarily to feminists) rather than to readers of undefined gender, even when the author’s intention is that men should also have access to it. Growing bodies of feminist work are now often concerned with even more specific communities of women, as in the case of Joyce Trebilcock’s *Dyke Ideas*.<sup>33</sup> Such philosophy does not speak directly to all philosophical readers, although any might take an interest in it. Its data are not the data of all our lives, but then, neither are the data of the philosophical traditions. Particularist authors may use the pronoun “we” in ways that do not include all readers, in a deliberate response to the convention of using “we” for relatively privileged white men and “they” for everyone else. Although the older uses of “we” continue to be appropriate in some contexts, in others it often alienates those of us who cannot identify with references to “our” servants or “our” wives.

Does a particularist use of “we” then perpetuate exclusions in the same way that *we* found objectionable when used by those dominant in past traditions? It need not do so. As I argue elsewhere, it would be disrespectful to create expectations of inclusion in readers, say, by purporting to speak of the human condition and then to use language in ways that in fact exclude many readers.<sup>34</sup> But if an author does not create false expectations of inclusion, a particularist focus need not be disrespectful. It can be salutary for some readers to have to realize that they do not belong to the potential audience at the center of that author’s attention, that they are perhaps not even part of the audience in that author’s head. The deliberate and explicit self-consciousness with which feminist philosophers often address women should not create false expectations of inclusion among male readers, even if some male readers find such expectations natural as the legacy of their his-

tory of having occupied center stage. At various points in this work, I use "we" to refer to women, to lesbians, to philosophers, and to descendants of Northern Europeans, relying on context to make as clear as is needed for purposes at hand the scope of the "we."

It is, of course, both possible and in general desirable to take an interest in the data of the lives of people unlike ourselves. Yet a special, philosophical loss accrues to those who are routinely on the outside looking in, those whose lives are either ignored or treated disrespectfully in philosophical arguments that invoke the data of daily life in testing and developing ideas. A widely shared conception of philosophy is as a Socratic project of coming to know ourselves. This is what many understand by Socratic philosophy, meaning not the specific texts of Plato's Socratic dialogues but rather the ideal suggested in some of the earlier ones (such as Plato's *Apology*) that philosophy is a kind of self-knowledge.<sup>35</sup> Insofar as philosophy is a Socratic project of coming to know ourselves, reflecting solely on the data of lives that are not much like ours does not readily develop our own capacities for philosophical wisdom. If we have access only to philosophy that is based on the data of other people's lives, the activity of philosophical inquiry is likely to be far less engaging than it should be. Worse, empathy with some dominant points of view is dangerous for some of us in that it can encourage us to identify with attitudes hostile to ourselves. When philosophers uncritically invoke data embodying hostile or disrespectful attitudes toward women, for example, women are probably better off alienated than empathetically involved.<sup>36</sup> At any rate, such philosophy does alienate many of us.

Particularism in philosophy offers the potentiality of making philosophy a vehicle of self-knowledge for groups with histories of philosophical disenfranchisement. A question, then, is whether that means that it can make philosophy a good thing for us. Historically, philosophy has been not only a vehicle of self-knowledge but also a vehicle of self-deception. Some of its vulnerabilities as a source of knowledge should give us moral pause. It has presented men as though they constituted the species and society as though it consisted of privileged men. In so doing, it omits the perspectives of workers whose labor has made possible the leisure that philosophical investigation requires. The voices of such laborers might have articulated points of view and aspirations at odds with those embraced by, or sometimes even attributed to them by, philosophers. Those who have lacked the leisure for philosophy might

also have exposed evils unacknowledged by philosophers whose inquiries their labors made possible.

My view is that a *self-conscious* particularism — one that does not pretend to be universalist — is more likely to avoid solipsistic and narcissistic arrogance and that it is thereby less liable to certain self-deceptions. Yet to avoid arrogance, we need consciousness of more than self. It has been characteristic of feminist particularists to be conscious of self not in abstraction but in relation to others and to be critical of representations of ourselves by those with systematic power over us. Also, if philosophy is not a luxury — as Ruth Ginzberg has recently argued that it is not — and if we can manage to elicit and support it without creating and supporting a relatively leisured class, it may reflect a more representative kaleidoscope of human activities and values.<sup>37</sup>

A case of particularism in style is the practice, which I follow in this book as I have followed it in others, of referring to women by both their first and last names, even after the first reference, rather than simply using patronyms after the first reference.<sup>38</sup> This practice maintains a lively sense of gender. More important, it avoids identifying us by naming practices that have subordinated us by subsuming us under men. There is no analogous reason to follow the same practice for men's names.

I turn next to holism and then to the question of its relationship to particularism.

### *Methodological Holism*

Many feminist philosophers resist attempts to understand individuals in abstraction from their relationships to others. We tend to contextualize ourselves in relationships of friendship, companionship, cohabitation, coworking, and the communities, systems, or "wholes" defined by these and by other significant relationships. What I here call "holism" might perhaps also be called "relationism." Human relationships — especially our earliest relationships to primary caretakers, in which we have no say whatsoever — are a major source of luck in our lives. But even later in life, we often have little to say about how others respond to us. With whom we have occasion to form relationships is a fact often delineated by factors beyond our control.

As with particularism, I adopt a *methodological* holism. It does not

commit me to the metaphysical view that individuals exist, or are intelligible, only through their relations to others, although that is an interesting and plausible idea. Holism in my work is a practical orientation in project definition, a special concern with interconnections and the wholes they create or disrupt.

Holism in much feminist thought has both a negative face and a positive one. The negative face consists in rejecting or at least questioning hierarchical dualisms or dichotomies that have been central to centuries of Northern culture: mind/body, reason/feeling, culture/nature, civilization/wilderness, man/woman (often represented as "masculine/feminine"), man/nature, and so on. The positive face has consisted in searching out and exploring nonhierarchical interdependencies and looking also for possibilities of decentralization of control and for less preoccupation with control.<sup>39</sup>

Consider first holism's negative face. Each side of the mind/body, reason/feeling, culture/nature, and masculine/feminine dualisms has its adherents. Socially, however, the lion's share of advantages — power, privilege, and prestige — has accrued regularly to those who have been identified with mind, reason, culture, and masculinity. The general point of these dichotomies and other related dichotomies has been to affirm control structures. These can become oppressive structures of domination and subordination: mind over body, reason over feeling, culture over nature, masculine over feminine, man over woman. A devaluation of what is subordinated is often used to "justify" the domination. These values even turn up even in philosophy as a profession in the opposition of "hard philosophy" (logic, philosophy of science, philosophy of mathematics) to "soft philosophy" (value inquiry in the areas of ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, social and political philosophy). Resistance to the implied "femininity" of "soft philosophy" is at least one factor underlying the spectacle of some philosophers' attempts to structure value inquiry through mathematical formulae.

Historically, hierarchical dichotomies have been used against women of many cultures, who have been identified with body, feeling, nature, and the feminine. They have been used also by white societies to identify men of color with the feminine and with body, feeling, and nature. The move to reject or at least question these hierarchical dichotomies marks an interesting overlap of social protest philosophies, such as anarchism, feminism, and antiracism, with the newly developing fields

of philosophical ecology and environmental ethics. This overlap can be seen in the movements of social ecology and ecofeminism.<sup>40</sup>

A characteristic form of the rejection of hierarchical dichotomies leads us to the positive face of holism, which is also another major area of overlap between social protest philosophies and philosophical ecology. The strategy, in all these cases, has been, not to allow one side of the dichotomy to swallow the other, but instead to emphasize and explore interconnections and interdependencies of mind and body, reason and feeling, culture and nature in ways that undermine the negative valuations regularly attached to the body, feeling, nature, women and in ways that expose questionable political purposes served by domination and by control of the body, feeling, nature, women. When we look at interrelationships as constitutive of various systems, we are also encouraged to ask whether a particular system is a good thing and whether it is doing well.

Holism as such is not incompatible with hierarchies and dichotomies. Wholes and systems can certainly be defined by relations of dominance and subordination. From a functional point of view, hierarchies often appear natural and desirable. Chains of authority, for example, increase production efficiency. Military operations are difficult to conceive of without chains of command. If however, we evaluate a community or interaction not solely in functional terms but also in terms of phenomenological relationships between members of the community or interaction and their responses to one another, dominance and subordination present a different aspect. Hierarchies that involve dominance and subordination encourage a preoccupation with forms of control that alienate individuals from each other. Such alienation tends to block the empathy and identification required for bonding. It interferes with appreciations that form the bases of mutual respect. When people (and other animals) are known by proper names, for example, instead of simply by their functions (as wives, slaves, servants, livestock), it is more difficult to think of them simply, or even primarily, as beings who are likely to get out of control or to think of them simply, or even primarily, as beings functioning at this or that level of efficiency.

The chapters that follow reflect on the ethical consequences for relationships of being positioned early in life on the disfavored end of hierarchical dichotomies and to some extent try to envision what we might be like in more egalitarian or nonoppressive relationships.



### *A Few Questions*

A certain difficulty may present itself to thinkers who find both holism and particularism attractive: it may not be obvious that holism and particularism are compatible with each other. For a particular suggests a part, something that is less than the whole. If we have a particularist focus, how can we claim to be at the same time holistic? How can those of us who sometimes encourage boycotts, withdrawals, even revolutions, any of which can be highly disruptive of systems, consider ourselves holists?

The answer to this query requires us to draw some distinctions. A whole (a system, perhaps a community) does not have to be the whole of everything. It does not have to be the whole universe. Holism — at least, methodological holism — does not imply that the best way to view *everything* that exists is as belonging to or integrated into one gigantic system. Nor does holism imply that every system is a good thing. Particularist feminist philosophers have been concerned with such wholes as consciousness (considered as a unity of feeling and intellect), households, communities, lands (in Aldo Leopold's sense of the land as a community whose members are animals, plants, soils, and waters), multicultural societies. These wholes are also historical particulars. They are particular communities, identities, cultures developed in particular lands. A particular community, system, or relationship may be poorly constituted or well constituted, thriving or decadent. Withdrawing from a poorly constituted whole is often a first step toward constituting a better one.

These considerations suggest two further questions, one for particularism and another for holism. I elaborate above on the question for particularism: Is there any nonarbitrary point at which to stop particularizing? Carrying particularity to its theoretical limit seems to reduce us to inarticulate pointing. The question for holism is about hierarchies and dichotomies: Can we eliminate them without defeating our own ends as social critics? Some "dichotomies" are necessary to critical reflection, for example, the "dichotomies" of right and wrong and of good and bad.<sup>41</sup> Feminist holists will surely be the first to admit, or rather insist on, the importance of evaluation. Yet evaluating seems to rely on and support what may look, at first, like hierarchical dichotomies: the acceptable and the unacceptable, the justifiable and the unjustifiable, and so on.

In response to the first question, why should we stop at a focus on women (for example) when women also differ along many other dimensions, there is probably no good reason to carry methodological particularism to its theoretical limit. Particularism has a *historical* importance, which sets limits to its value and makes a variety of "stopping points" nonarbitrary. Particularism takes on importance against the background of histories in which particular groups of people have been marginalized or treated disrespectfully. Feminist particularists in fact demonstrate lively interest in ethnic and other differences besides the gender difference. Not every conceivable kind of difference among us is historically significant, however.

In response to the second question, whether we can dispense with hierarchies and dichotomies without defeating our own ends, not all ratings and rankings govern or are correlated with distributions of power. Holism, like particularism, is important against the background of histories in which marginalization and disrespect have been damaging, resulting in our underdevelopment or in internalized hostility to ourselves. These kinds of damage do not result merely from employing the distinctions of right and wrong or good and bad. The question whether we can eliminate hierarchical dichotomies without defeating our own ends as social critics is really the question whether we can get along without value hierarchies or normative hierarchies. This question, however, is grounded on a confusion. The distinctions between right and wrong, or between good and bad, do not define hierarchies in the relevant sense. They do not define a *dominance order* or a distribution of power. Judging that something is right or good, justifiable or unjustifiable, does not assign to it any power whatsoever.

### *Some Conclusions and Future Directions*

The growing academic consciousness of histories of racism, sexism, and class oppression suggests that particularism and holism will find places in philosophy for a long time to come. For me, feminist particularism and holism have meant a departure from the kind of philosophy with which I began as an undergraduate when I abandoned the naive cultural relativism of my parents for Marcus Singer's *Generalization in Ethics* and, following in a similar vein as a graduate student, became immersed in John Rawls's magnificent theory of justice.<sup>42</sup> It has

also been something of a move away from Kant and toward Aristotle and Nietzsche, although not all the way.

Constructing principles of justice in Rawls's theory involved *donning* veils of ignorance, pretending to a certain amnesia in which we were to forget who we were (which I was only too happy to do) and abstract from most of our knowledge of history (where I was already far less knowledgeable than I should have been). A danger of this enterprise is that even were the veil to screen out our knowledge of our histories, it would not thereby inhibit the actual influence of those histories. If anything, the influence of those histories may actually be aided by our very lack of awareness or attention to them. The most successful veils may leave us vulnerable to biases that we are ill-equipped to detect. That is not necessarily a reason to give up on striving for the ability to attain the universality that the theory seeks. Rawls's more recent limitation of his theory of justice to a political conception that does not embody a comprehensive philosophical outlook but is intended to gain the support of an overlapping consensus still emphasizes commonalities, although in a way that is deeply respectful of differences.<sup>43</sup> Yet even this more modest conception of universality needs to be supplemented by other, more particularist, endeavors, which, for many of us, are more pressing. In poorly integrated multicultural societies plagued by ethnocentric racism and androcentric sexism, many of us need to learn to identify and then *peel back* veils of ignorance that we may not have known were already in place, ignorance that can serve questionable political ends. Ethically, we have ignored too much. Our identities are not transparent to ourselves, not determinable a priori, Descartes notwithstanding. Coming to know who we are, historically speaking, can be a difficult labor.

The ideals articulated behind a Rawlsian veil of ignorance are framed on the assumption that once they are accepted, everyone will for the most part abide by them. They are principles for what Rawls calls a "well-ordered society," which is a just society in which everyone has an effective sense of justice, in important respects the same sense of justice, and knows this about everyone else.<sup>44</sup> It is not clear how such principles framed for this ideal society are to connect with ethical issues arising out of histories of evil in contexts that are nowhere near just. It might seem that we could frame principles of justice behind a veil of ignorance on other assumptions than the assumption of perfect compliance, say, on the assumption that they would apply in the context of a society structured by histories of deep injustice. After trying this experiment in

thinking about criminal justice, which Rawls has acknowledged belongs for the most part to "partial compliance theory," I have come to doubt that very much can be done along these lines behind a thick veil of ignorance, although in Chapter Four I consider some plausible abstract suggestions for a theory of basic evils.<sup>45</sup> For the most part, however, we need to get into the particulars of histories of injustice, and these drag us back to the world on the other side of the veil, or perhaps, they put us behind much thinner veils. It is no accident that Rawlsian theorists behind the thick veil of ignorance operate mostly on assumptions of strict rather than partial compliance or widespread noncompliance. In discussing "the law of peoples," Rawls does give some serious attention to the problem of noncompliance, treating the noncompliance of some peoples as a problem regarding the limits of tolerance by others.<sup>46</sup> Yet even here he does not get very far into the difficult questions about what justice might require where those limits are exceeded.

A society in which ideals of justice are grossly violated is the one in which we live (as Rawls also acknowledges). This continuing history occupies center stage in my concerns. If philosophy is to be wisdom in the conduct of my life, I need it to connect with this history and not simply to offer me a fantasy escape from it. For this, it is not enough to confront the inequities of the "natural lottery" from which we may inherit various physical and psychological assets and liabilities. It is important also to reflect on the *unnatural* lottery created by networks of unjust institutions and histories that bequeath to us further inequities in our starting positions and that violate principles that would have addressed, if not redressed, inequities of nature.

As a legacy from the days of William James when libraries catalogued philosophy together with psychology, the Harvard philosophy graduate program had for many years a psychology requirement. Perhaps the time has come for philosophy programs to institute a history requirement (although academic history is not free of bias, either). Much of the data of the histories that philosophy needs are only recently being archived, acknowledged as important, and made more generally visible in the academy: histories of daily working-class life, women's histories, histories of Jews in the Diaspora, histories of so-called Third World peoples, Native American histories, Asian American histories, African American histories—histories that have been researched, critically evaluated, and defined by historians who identify and empathize with the people whose stories they tell.<sup>47</sup>