FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES IN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Bren April Markey

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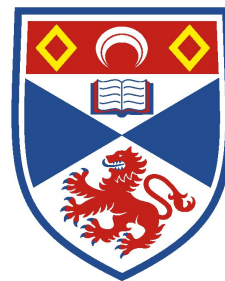
Bren April Markey

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I, Bren April Markey, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September, 2010 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in September, 2010; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of Stirling and the University of St Andrews between 2010 and 2015.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis develops a critique of the methodology of mainstream academic moral philosophy, based on insights from feminist and more generally anti-oppressive political thought. The thesis consists of two parts.

In the first, I loosely characterise a certain dominant methodology of philosophy, one based on giving an important epistemological role to existing, 'pre-theoretical' moral attitudes, such as intuitions. I then argue that such methodologies may be critiqued on the basis of theories that identify these moral attitudes as problematically rooted in oppressive social institutions, such as patriarchy and white supremacy; that is, I identify these attitudes as ideological, and so a poor guide to moral reality.

In the second part, I identify and explore of a number of themes and tendencies from feminist, anti-racist, and other anti-oppressive traditions of research and activism, in order to draw out the implications of these themes for the methodology of moral philosophy. The first issue I examine is that of how, and how much, moral philosophers should use abstraction; I eventually use the concept of intersectionality to argue for the position that philosophers need to use less, and a different type of, abstraction. The second major theme I examine is that of ignorance, in the context of alternative epistemologies: standpoint epistemology and epistemologies of ignorance. I argue that philosophers must not take themselves to be well placed to understand, using solitary methodologies, any topic of moral interest. Finally, I examine the theme of transformation in moral philosophy. I argue that experiencing certain kinds of personal transformation may be an essential part of developing accurate ethical views, and I draw out the political implications of this position for the methodology of moral philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

Moral philosophy is typically researched, written and taught as though it can, by and large, be kept separate from political concerns, as though we can make judgements about theft and euthanasia, and choose between theories like utilitarianism and deontology, without worrying too much about the social world where these judgements and theories have been developed, and are to be applied. As my experiences both within and outside of philosophy made me more aware of the ubiquity of political concerns, I became increasingly suspicious of, and frustrated by this attitude within philosophy, and this thesis is largely a product of that suspicion and frustration.

The goal of this thesis is quite diffuse; I do not just aim to stake any particular position within a recognised philosophical debate, or defend a single philosophical view. Rather, the project is to identify and explore some themes and tendencies that I have encountered within feminist, and more generally anti-oppressive, research and practice, and to apply those insights I uncover to the methodology of moral philosophy. In doing so, I develop a number of feminist critiques of the methodology of moral philosophy, as it is currently practised, without meaning to ever present a complete picture of how moral philosophy *should* be done, a singular *right* methodology. That said, a number of recurring themes come together to present a coherent view of how of moral philosophy may be better practised, with greater epistemic humility, a greater diversity of methods and interests, and much more weight placed on the experiences and judgements of those who suffer from injustice.

Naturally, I deal with many more political concerns and debates than most works of moral philosophy. Nonetheless, though this thesis may go some way towards problematising any sharp distinction between moral and political philosophy, I do identify this thesis as a work in moral philosophy, addressed to those who work in moral philosophy. I am specifically arguing that moral philosophy needs to be more political, to deal more directly with the political, not just in order to be relevant, but also to be *good* and *accurate*.

Structurally, I see this thesis as separable into two unequal sections. The first three, relatively short chapters begin in what I take to be something like the mainstream of academic moral philosophy, at least in the analytic, anglophone tradition that I have largely been educated in. I aim to present a rough picture of how moral philosophy is typically practised, before

examining a few possible critiques of that practice, eventually arguing in favour of a fairly radical political critique rooted in the critical social theories, such as feminism and critical race theory. The last three chapters, which make up the bulk of the thesis, have fewer points of connection with mainstream moral philosophy, as I develop this radical political critique through direct engagement with those critical social theories, exploring themes and employing theories in order to challenge particular arguments, debates, and methodologies that I take to be typical of mainstream moral philosophy. My direct interest in those arguments and debates, particular the abortion debate which I discuss a number of times, is, in this thesis, secondary to my interest in using them to illustrate something about philosophical methodology.

Given this structure, I could hope that the thesis would be well suited to lead an audience situated in the mainstream of moral philosophy towards feminist insights and understanding. However, for reasons that I discuss in the final chapter, I am not particularly confident that this thesis could reliably accomplish such a thing, and I would not consider it a failure if it fails to do so. Rather I suspect that some sympathy towards, if not familiarity with, the political claims I explore might be necessary to entirely follow and be convinced by my arguments. That is to say, ultimately I imagine my audience to be those who are already somewhat inclined to engage with feminist and anti-oppressive theories; perhaps even those, like myself upon commencing my postgraduate studies, entirely educated in mainstream moral philosophy but sympathetic to, even desperate for, feminist theory.

The shape of the thesis mirrors my own philosophical development. When I began to work on it, my interest and much of my moral philosophical knowledge was in Henry Sigdwick and contemporary Utilitarian ethics. I began work on a thesis aimed at defending normative hedonism as a theory of well-being. Though very little of this work remains, considereing intuition-based arguments against hedonism,set me down the methodological path that I have followed to a quite distant philosophical destination. Of course, this history has shaped the final thesis, particularly due to the depth of knowledge it gave me about mainstream analytic ethics, and the relative lack of knowledge I *started* with around feminist ethics and methodologies.

The thesis has also been significantly shaped by my own position and experiences as a trans woman. For example, my early interest in critiquing the use of intuition in moral philosophy was guided by these experiences, particularly by my gradual realisation that my own non-explicit moral intuitions and attitudes were not just unfounded and contingent, but actually made my own

life unliveable. To uncover such attitudes, in both myself and others, and to reject their validity was not just a theoretical, but also a practical necessity.[1] Similarly, upon coming to feminist theory, many of my interests and attitudes were shaped by my particular experiences as a trans woman, and by the work of other transfeminists; most obviously my deep suspicion of essentialism in feminism, and my interest in the epistemic power of transformative experience.

Relatedly, my background has also given me a complicated relationship to the work of many of the cisgender feminists I discuss, which has often been produced in the context of a deeply transphobic, trans-exclusionary feminist movement. As Katherine Cross has put it, "to be a trans woman who proposes to become an academic feminist is to consciously walk across shards of glass — bits of the canon hither and thither written by people, mostly white cis women, who could not see you as anything other than a ghostly abstraction made up of their nightmares. And I have to learn from them."[2]

Due to the influence of this background, though I only occasionally discuss topics relating specifically to trans folk, I consider this thesis to be a work of transfeminism, a contribution to and continuation of that relatively young intellectual and political tradition. In particular, I would like to acknowledge my immense intellectual, philosophical, and personal debt to other transfeminists, trans theorists, and trans woman writers, from whom I have learned so much.

Of course, this thesis is also influenced by the other social positions I occupy, perhaps most notably as white and middle-class. The social privileges afforded to me by these positions have shaped, and usually restricted, my worldview. I have been protected from many of the most overt forms of oppression, such as violence, homelessness and incarceration, which are disproportionately inflicted upon trans women of colour. I have been educated into racist, white supremacist ways of thinking, and my social position has given me less personal motivation to overcome these ideologies. Though I now try to learn from and engage with the work of feminists of colour, and other anti-racist theorists, the task of combating my own epistemologies of ignorance is ongoing.[3] My tendency in this thesis to focus on feminist issues, thinkers, and theories, in preference to other anti-oppressive theories, is a particularly obvious result of my position as a white woman.

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1   Though I have not explored this theme in the depth that it deserves, there are hints of it in chapters 2 and 6.
2   Cross (2014a), "May We Have This Dance? On Learning and Writing as a Trans Woman of Color," *Feministing*, December 11th, 2014, http://feministing.com/2014/12/11/may-we-have-this-dance-on-learning-and-writing-as-a-trans-woman-of-color/
3   I will discuss this issue of social position, and particularly epistemologies of ignorance, in chapter 5.

Many of the issues raised in this thesis – of abstraction, objectivity, identity, social ontology, and so forth – are extremely philosophically deep, and discussed in a huge body of literature both within and outside of feminist philosophy. As such, it often necessary for me to quite brutally contain the scope of my thesis. My primary interest is in questions of methodology and moral philosophy, and my interest in many of the important, related topics that arise is secondary; I discuss them as they are relevant to moral methodology, but not for their own sake. As such, I frequently pull the focus of my writing back to whenever it threatens to wander. This means that I often put aside issues that others may find more interesting, or philosophically essential.

Most notably, due to the extreme depth and complexity of the issue, I have tried to avoid the debates over realism and anti-realism in ethics, and often use terms like "true" or "accurate," while hoping that nothing I say hangs on a commitment to any *particularly* strong position on these issues.[4] That said, throughout this thesis I draw upon a range of theories advocated by a mix of pragmatists, moral realists, and a few postmodernists, while hoping the insights I take from them would not be entirely and fatally invalidated by a difference of meta-ethics. Most obviously, the standpoint theory which I draw upon through much of chapters five and six stands in a complex and sometimes unclear relation to all three of these meta-ethical positions.[5] I ultimately believe the theory survives these tensions, for the reasons discussed by its advocates, but I have not devoted much work towards a dedicated examination of this issue. However, at a minimum I take myself to be committed, along with Charles Mills, to a kind of minimal realism, where "*truth, falsity, facts, reality,* and so forth are not enclosed with ironic scare-quotes."[6]

Another concept which I never directly address, though it appears throughout a great deal of this thesis, is liberalism. Due to my background in, and focus on moral philosophy, I did not initially identify liberalism as a target of my critiques. However, liberalism emerged as a theme in the thesis as I noticed that many of the philosophical works I draw upon were targeting, sometimes primarily, various aspects of liberalism – liberal abstraction, liberal epistemology, even liberal feminism. Conversely, some of the philosophers I draw upon a great deal describe

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4   I discuss the danger of focusing too heavily on such 'foundational' issues in chapter 2, in the section "Further Differences in the Three Approaches."

5   See Hekman (1997), "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited," *Signs* 22:2, pp. 341-365, which takes a postmodern position in order to critique standpoint theories on this issue. See also the relies from Hartsock, Collins, Harding and Smith, following in the same journal, and further Kukla & Ruetsche (2002), "Contingent Natures and Virtuous Knowers: Could Epistemology be Gendered?" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 32:3, pp. 389-418.

6   Mills (2007), "White Ignorance," in Sullivan and Tuana (2007), p. 15.

themselves as liberals; most notably Charles Mills, who advocates "black radical liberalism."[7] The task of relating the specific methodological tendencies I discuss to some possible role within liberal discourse or institutions is not one that I engage in, through it is sometimes discussed by the philosophers whose work I draw upon.[8]

It is notable that many of the wider themes and issues I touch upon throughout the thesis are also of particular interest to liberal political theory. For example, a major theme in the later chapters of this thesis is, roughly, the idea that reasoning which proceeds from some particular perspective or standpoint may be inaccessible (in some sense) to those who occupy different standpoints. This may be seen to echo Rawls' particular interest, in *Political Liberalism*, in the fact that "Different conceptions of the world can reasonably be elaborated from different standpoints and diversity arises in part from our distinct perspectives."[9] This fact underlies Rawls' position regarding the priority of the right over the good, a central elements in his version of political liberalism. However, despite the apparent similarity, the kind of perspective and standpoints I am interested in seem quite importantly different to those that interest Rawls. Rawls is concerned with "opposing and conflicting philosophical doctrines,"[10] but the very way that I and other feminists conceive of the opposing interests we are concerned with seems to pre-emptively block the liberal solution that Rawls wants to promote. The opposition between a feminist standpoint and a patriarchal standpoint is deep and fundamental; the feminist standpoint is specifically oriented around challenging and rejecting a patriarchal standpoint. Insofar as some political arrangement was devised to allow these doctrines to coexist, the feminist must consider this – the continued existence and influence of a patriarchal standpoint – to constitute a kind of failure of feminist politics. Relatedly, as I will discuss in chapter 4, because the feminist conceives of the patriarchal perspective as politically dominant and powerful, any solution to the problem of conflicting standpoints based on liberal neutrality must be seen as implicitly favouring the patriarchal status quo. For these reasons, I see both my understanding and treatment of the issue of conflicting political standpoints as somewhat more radical than that of liberal philosophers such as Rawls.

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7   Mills (2015), "Black Radical Liberalism," *PEA Soup*, February 23rd, 2015,
    http://peasoup.typepad.com/peasoup/2015/02/black-radical-liberalism-and-why-it-isnt-an-oxymoron.html
8   For example, in Schwartzman (2006), *Challenging Liberalism: Feminism and Political Critique*, (Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park, PA), and Jaggar (1983), *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, (The Harvester Press: Sussex).
9   Rawls (1993), *Political Liberalism*, (Columbia University Press: New York), p. 58.
10 Rawls (1993), p. 9.

In the first chapter I aim to present a rough picture of what I take to be the dominant methodologies in moral philosophy. I do this through an exploration of what kind of role philosophers may see for the pre-existing moral attitudes - desires and aversions, intuitions, 'common sense,' etc - they *bring* to their practice of philosophy. I look particularly at four methodological roles philosophers may see their attitudes as playing: 1) A kind of data that moral philosophy seeks to capture in an abstract theory, 2) The starting point from which moral philosophy proceeds through some techniques of refinement, 3) A particularly important source of evidence for moral theories, and 4) As desiderata for a good moral theory. I do not intend these four roles to be either mutually exclusive or exhaustive, but rather as illustrative of some of the more usual ways for moral philosophers to treat their moral attitudes. Though the chapter I am concerned with the question of whether those approaches to moral philosophy which are methodologically conservative - in the sense of giving a positive, epistemically privileged role to the philosopher's pre-existing moral attitudes – will also tend to be morally and politically conservative. I do not yet, in this chapter, mean to show that such methodological, moral, or political conservatism must be a bad thing.

The second chapter looks at various ways of advancing what I've called the geneological critique against the use of pre-theoretical moral attitudes, particularly intuitions, in moral philosophy. By geneological critique, I mean critique based on the idea that awareness of the source of these attitudes must undermine our faith in their epistemological value. I look at three particular approaches to making this critique: 1) The historical approach, which claims that we only have our intuitions due to some contingent historical facts which give us no reason to believe those intuitions may be accurate, true, or appropriate. 2) The evolutionary approach, which claims that our moral intuitions and attitudes derive from the way our ancestors adapted to evolutionary pressures, and are therefore disconnected from any normative truth, and unsuited for moral life in the modern world, and 3) The social approach, which sees our moral attitudes are created and *maintained* by continuing systematic social influences, which tends to be oppressive or unjust, and so distort and pervert our moral judgement. Much of this chapter is devoted to developing the third, social approach, and arguing that it is more powerful than the other approaches, and leads more directly to improved moral methodologies.

The third, relatively brief chapter aims to head off a specific objection to taking the social

critique of intuition seriously: the objection that the relevance of ideology and oppressive social attitudes will be limited to a small number of moral issues, such as abortion and euthanasia. I head off this objection first by arguing that attitudes such as racism and sexism touch on a surprisingly large number of issues, that, as Kristin Waters has put it, "In philosophy, common topics that are often assumed not to be raced or gendered may reveal themselves to be so under closer scrutiny."[11] Secondly, I argue that these issues of ideology and oppressive social attitudes will be more widely relevant to the methodology of moral philosophy insofar as they influence not only our judgements about particular moral issues, but also the wider methodological decisions about what moral issues to study.

The fourth chapter marks the start of the second section of my thesis, where I explore specific themes and tendencies from feminist research and politics in order to critique methodologies in moral philosophy. In this chapter I focus on the discussion of abstraction and idealisation that appears in various articles by Onora O'Neill, and some developments of and criticisms of that discussion in the work of Charles Mills and Lisa Schwartzman. I conclude this chapter by looking at the issue of abstraction in terms of the concept of intersectionality, developed from Black feminist thought, and finally illustrate the critique of abstraction that I have developed through an exploration of a usually neglected moral issue - of particular interest to transfeminists – misgendering.

The fifth chapter explores the idea, common in feminist though and practice, that the judgements and perspectives of those who suffer from injustice should be epistemically valued over that of those who perpetuate or benefit from it. I explore this idea by examining alternative epistemologies which give us reason to trust the perspective of the marginalised, and distrust the perspectives of the privileged, namely standpoint epistemologies, and epistemologies of ignorance. My goal is to undermine what I call universalistic first-personal methodologies in moral philosophy, which present the philosopher as epistemically self-sufficient, able to get at the moral truth through only their own judgements and understandings, without the need to listen to or learn from others. To close off this chapter, I illustrate my methodological conclusions by applying them to a specific moral philosophical method: thought experiments.

The final chapter turns to the role of personal experience in moral philosophy, particularly of transformative experiences which radically alter an individual's moral worldview. I mainly

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11   Waters (2014), "Past as Prologue: Intersectional Analysis from the Nineteenth Century to the Twenty-First," in Goswami, O'Donovan & Yount (2014), p. 33.

explore this idea through discussions of trans awakening, and of political consciousness, particularly feminist consciousness and the practice of consciousness raising. I argue that moral philosophers need to take seriously the idea that undergoing morally transformative experiences may be an indispensible part of the methodology of moral philosophy. Finally, I conclude by arguing that moral philosophers will need to radically expand their idea of what kinds of activities constitutes *doing* moral philosophy, in particular to include political activity designed to improve epistemic access to social and moral reality, both for themselves, and for all other philosophers and people.

CHAPTER 1 - METHODOLOGICAL CONSERVATISM IN MORAL THEORY

In this chapter I am concerned with investigating the notion of conservatism, as it applies to moral philosophy, to become clearer on what we might mean when we issue a charge of conservatism. In doing so, I hope to also present a loose overview of what I take to be some dominant methodologies in moral philosophy as it is currently practised. As a rough starting point for this discussion, I take conservatism in moral philosophy to be a tendency displayed by those moral theories, views, or methods which in certain ways ways privilege, rely upon, or are deeply concerned with the particular moral attitudes that we initially bring to moral philosophy, whether in the form of pre-existing moral beliefs, commonly held moral attitudes, moral intuitions or anything similar.

In this I differ strongly from Kai Nielsen, who uses the phrase 'moral conservatism' synonymously with 'absolutism,' to refer to moral theories that do not give any moral role or weight to the consequences of actions.[1] Though, as I see it, consequentialist theories may have *some* inclination against moral conservatism, as they must allow for the *possibility* that even our most deeply held and cherished moral beliefs about particular actions may be shown to be false, upon empirical investigation, it is nonetheless true that some consequentialist theories may be

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1   See Nielsen (1972) "Against Moral Conservatism," *Ethics* 82:3

importantly conservative.

For example, R. M. Hare thought it essential to demonstrate how his Utilitarianism was, on some ordinary practical level, largely consistent with many of the everyday moral judgements we intuitively make.[2] We may also identify some methodological conservatism in Henry Sidgwick's concern with showing that a form of Utilitarianism could be reached by applying philosophical pressure to ordinary intuitional moral beliefs, that "the Morality of Common Sense is unconsciously or implicitly Utilitarian."[3]

We can easily imagine other kinds of deeply conservative consequentialist theories. For example, a theory which was concerned with *maximising* social obedience, or adherence with a stringent set of sexual norms, may obviously be deeply conservative despite potentially licensing morally counter-intuitive acts, insofar as it were based on simply assuming some particular, not independently justified, conservative moral value to be important. Less obviously, we may imagine a consequentialist theory which avoids that problem, on the level of abstract moral values, but which recommends deeply conservative decision procedures, or methods for determining consequences. For example, a Utilitarian theory which took pleasure as the only good could go on to recommend that agents determine what is pleasurable by introspecting, and determining whether a particular experience is the kind of thing that they, the particular introspecting agent, would go in for. This kind of procedure could, used by some particular people, discount as possibly pleasurable, say, masochistic sexual practices, or foreign culinary delicacies, which some other less conservative procedure may recognise as a source of pleasure in the appropriate circumstances, for example, when sampled by a relevantly appropriate person. Furthermore, just as not all consequentialist theories need be anti-conservative, so too not all non-consequentialist, or absolutist theories need be conservative.

At this point, it's worth noting a certain ambiguity in the idea of conservatism I've been using: it's not always clear whose moral beliefs we should see conservatism as relating to. For example, while veganism is not at all a widespread belief or practice in our society, it may seem deeply obvious and intuitive to someone raised as a vegan, or even to someone who was strongly convinced of it, or powerfully converted to it, recently. Must we suppose that Utilitarianism was more conservative for J. S. Mill, because he was raised by Utilitarians? It seems unhelpful to

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2   This is a simplification of Hare's thought, which I will discuss more later. See Hare (1971) *Essays on Philosophical Method* (MacMillan Press: London), chap. 7, and Hare (1981) *Moral Thinking* (Oxford University Press: Oxford), chap. 1-3.
3   Raphael, (1974), "Sidgwick on Intuitionism," in *The Monist* 58:3, p. 411.

suggest that the degree of moral conservatism of a view like veganism may turn just on the personal history of the person holding it.

Similarly, some putative moral values, such as chastity or honour, may be seen as deeply conservative, even if few people in our society actually hold these to be valuable in the traditional way. This may have something to do with the history of these values, their influence on our culture, or perhaps their being embedded in, and expressed by, our enduring institutions, as for example the value of chastity is expressed in some of the customs and laws relating to marriage.

Though I am not particularly interested in ironing out all possible vagueness from the concept of conservativeness, it will help here to make a distinction between two kinds of conservatism we may encounter in ethics. The first is the fairly familiar notion of moral/social/political conservatism, which involves some kind of belief in or allegiance to some set of traditional or socially dominant moral beliefs or institutions. The second is a more technical notion I'd like to introduce of methodological conservatism, which involves a moral thinker giving some kind of privileged status to the moral beliefs, attitudes or values that they initially bring to the process of their moral thinking. From here on, I am primarily interested in this latter concept, though one of my interests is in how methodological conservatism may serve to promote or perpetuate morally conservative attitudes.

There are a few things to spell out in this idea of methodological conservatism. The first regards what we mean by 'moral thinking.' By this, I include moral thought on a number of levels, including abstract theorising about the nature and structure of morality, general thinking about moral principles, and thinking about the morality of particular actions, the level of judgement. I am open to the possibility that methodological conservatism could operate on any of these levels, thought it most obviously applies to the levels of principles and judgement.

The more crucial detail to spell out is the notion of giving privileged status to our pre-existing moral attitudes. By this, I mean granting some *special* epistemic or methodological role to these attitudes. Though this idea needs to be a bit more specific, I intend it to cover a fairly wide range of possible ways that a thinker may treat their pre-existing moral attitudes, which may be carefully distinguished, but will tend to over-lap and co-occur.

In what follows, I explore some of these ways, and consider how they may contribute to moral conservatism in the resulting philosophy. In doing so, I am mainly focusing on the methodologies of the kinds of moral philosophy I have been most familiar with, those that were

most prominent in my own early education, and which I take to have some degree of dominance in contemporary analytic moral philosophy more widely. These are particularly those approaches in the Kantian and consequentialist tradition, along with some more intuitional and some less theoretical approaches. Politically, these approaches are most associated with liberalism, though they have had some more radical or conservative practitioners. The most obvious absence here is that I am not particularly discussing or drawing upon approaches from the tradition of virtue ethics. This is partly due to my own lack of deep knowledge of this tradition, but also because I suspect virtue ethical approaches will often avoid much of the methodological critiques I make throughout this thesis. Relatedly, I don't discuss, in this chapter, explicitly feminist approaches to moral philosophy, such as the ethics of care.

Moral Attitudes as Data or Starting Point

A moral philosopher may take their initial moral attitudes purely as a set of data to be explained, systematised, or captured by a moral theory. This is perhaps the most conservative attitude one could take towards the methodology of moral philosophy. It seems to lead to a purely descriptive role for moral theorising. Though hardly common, this seems to be the attitude of Michael Ruse, who sees moral philosophy as the business of charting the moral tendencies given by our evolutionary history.[4] There may also be elements of this attitude in the quietism of David Winch, though in his approach, actually building a moral theory may be superfluous; rather, just observing our moral tendencies may be all we can do.[5] However, this kind of approach is more often raised in order to be pushed away; defenders of reflective equilibrium will (quite rightly) assure us that this is *not* what their methodology amounts to, though they often thereby miss more subtle ways their methodology may be quite conservative.

More commonly, a moral philosopher may take their initial moral attitudes as the "starting point" of moral philosophy. This kind of claim is fairly common,[6] but also can be rather vague, perhaps intentionally so. It has an air of platitude. It may mean something as simple (though important) as the observation that we all come to moral philosophy with pre-existing moral attitudes, and that these will inevitably guide our attention, our sense of what is important or relevant, and our most immediate reactions to certain discussions or arguments. This is hardly

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4   Ruse & Wilson (1986), "Moral Philosophy as Applied Science," in *Philosophy* 61.
5   See Winch (1972), "Moral Integrity," in *Ethics and Action* (Routlege & Kegan Paul: London) p. 182.
6   For example, it appears in Bykvist (2010) *Utilitarianism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury: London), p. 14, and perhaps in Jackson (2000) *From Metaphysics to Ethics* (Oxford University Press: Oxford), p. 135.

objectionable, and is definitely worth keeping in mind, but it does not yet amount to granting any special privileged epistemic status to those attitudes. For example, a certain kind of dogmatic moral system might acknowledge that the starting point of moral thinking is our pre-existing attitudes, but then argue that these attitudes must be overcome, and replaced with a given set of moral commandments. This may not constitute a conservative methodology in the sense I have been concerned with (though, of course, it could lead to a conservative moral theory).

Before we can assess whether this Starting Point position on pre-existing moral attitudes might lead to a conservative moral methodology we need to specify what we are supposed to *do* with the attitudes which form our starting point. Perhaps one natural way to read this kind of claim is as a lighter version of the previous suggestion: in moral philosophy, we start with our pre-existing moral beliefs, and, as above, try to systematise them into a single coherent moral theory. However, these attitudes are only the starting point, and not also the end point, because we may find contradictions in our moral beliefs, and these will need to be resolved. This seems to be the view of Krister Bykvist, who emphasises the goal of coherence, and the likelihood of finding contradictions in our initial set of moral attitudes.[7]

This kind of project may not be purely descriptive because, insofar as it resulted in a single, coherent moral theory without contradictions, it could thereby offer normative recommendations and guidance to someone whose pre-existing moral attitudes suggest some mutually incompatible courses of action. On the other hand, it could remain purely descriptive by suggesting that the resolution to the contradictions found were somehow implicit in the original set of attitudes, or by offering no more guidance in the case of contradictions than 'a choice will have to be made here, and moral thinking can not help determine which choice, if any, is correct.' Regardless, it still looks like a very conservative methodological position, as it only allows for any change of moral attitude in these limited cases of contradiction, and then presumably only in ways *necessary* to resolve the contradictions. It does not seem able to licence, or to provide the resources for any particularly bold shifts in moral understanding.

Another philosopher who talks of our pre-existing moral beliefs as a starting point for moral philosophy is Frank Jackson, who claimed that, in doing moral philosophy, "we must start from somewhere in current folk morality, otherwise we start from somewhere *unintuitive*, and that can hardly be a good place to start from."[8] However, Jackson is not suggesting that we take our

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7   Bykvist (2010), p. 14.
8   Jackson (2000), p. 135.

entire set of moral beliefs as a starting point, as he also claims that when we build our moral theories "it is to be expected that we should start with a fragment that particularly appeals to us and seek to reconstruct the rest, near enough, from that fragment."[9] When he speaks of "reconstruct[ing] the rest," he does not necessarily mean reconstructing just our current folk morality, and ending where we started. Jackson draws a distinction between current folk morality, and mature folk morality. The former is "the network of moral opinions, intuitions, principles and concepts whose mastery is part and parcel of having a sense of what is right and wrong, and of being able to engage in meaningful debate about what ought to be done."[10] The latter is what our folk morality would become when fully exposed to debate and critical reflection.

However, Jackson tells us very little about how we should go about building a moral theory from an intuitive fragment. Again, we are left unclear what we are supposed to *do* with our starting point. However, when we look at Jackson's discussion of the practice of moral philosophy as a whole, rather than what an individual theory builder might do, the view does not look too dissimilar to the kind of coherence-building method I outlined above. Though Jackson does understand folk morality to be the kind of thing that could conceivably be completely shared only by a small number of agents[11], he insists that there must be sufficient overlap between our folk moralities for it to be even possible for people to share a moral language, and be able to coherently argue with one another about moral issues. This position is demanded by his moral functionalism, the view that "the meanings of the moral terms are given by their place in [the] network of input, output, and internal clauses that makes up folk morality."[12] There must be "a considerable measure of agreement about... general principles *broadly stated*."[13] Finally, Jackson's view about what currently happens in moral philosophy, and society's moral development, is that "we are currently seeking some kind of consensus about the nature and frequency of the exceptions to the general principles we share."[14]

This, then, looks similar to the kind of coherence-building method I discussed before, except understood on an interpersonal, rather than individual level: we, society as a whole, have a folk morality, but it is inconsistent with itself, as we lack agreement on the nature of exceptions to

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9   Jackson (2000), p. 135.
10   Jackson (2000), p. 130.
11   Jackson (2000), p. 131
12   Jackson (2000), p. 131. Of course, this leaves open the position that as a matter of fact there is not much overlap, because a lot of us don't in fact share a moral language, and are talking past one another, but Jackson does not seem to want to take this position.
13   Jackson (2000), p. 132.
14   Jackson (2000), p. 133.

our shared moral beliefs. This is still a rather conservative approach, one which naively ignores the often political nature of moral disagreement. The assumption that any moral thinker will broadly agree with some societal consensus over moral principles excludes those who live under conditions of marginalisation and oppression, which make it perfectly plain that the moral principles generally operative in their society are severely inadequate. However we cash out the scope and content of "folk morality," the idea that we all broadly agree on moral principles and are merely trying to sort out exceptions will turn out to be untenable, misleading, or insultingly exclusionary.

Consider, for example, moral disagreement over abortion. Perhaps we are supposed to assume a picture like: 'we all share a principle of a right to life, but we disagree over whether fetuses are an exception to this.' However, this picture of course privileges one way of framing the disagreement. We may insist on a more nuanced picture: 'we all share the principle of a right to bodily autonomy, but we disagree over whether an exception to this right exists when it conflicts with a right to life.' However this still glosses over the fact that the very way to frame this argument, the question of what principles are even in play, is contested. We are given no clear way to accommodate a feminist who argues "the right to life is simply irrelevant to this question." We are also left unable to accommodate arguments that don't proceed in terms of exceptions to supposedly shared principles, such as the argument that access to abortions should be unrestricted because otherwise abortion will continue in difficult and unsafe circumstances, or the argument that restrictions on abortion should be opposed as they are expressions of a patriarchal interest in the control of women's bodies and reproduction. What supposed shared principle is that argument operating on, the principle that the patriarchy should not control things?

Even the idea of characterising our principles as shared principles is dubious. Take again the right to life. Is this supposed to be a general right to life for all living things, whose exceptions include *most* living things? Or is it a right to life for all *persons*, which would force vegans to argue their moral case on different grounds? Our very understanding of the general principles themselves, rather than just their exceptions, is contestable. Jackson could insist that we need not find some characterisation of our principles that satisfies us all, but that, in keeping with moral functionalism, we could see our moral principles as individuated by clusters of similarity between their input, output and internal clauses: similarity between our responses to moral scenarios, encountered or posed, and our reasons for the responses. This would still be inadequate. It seems

unlikely that the experiences of two people with wildly different lives, even in the same society, who encounter wildly different challenges and injustices, would share enough input and output clauses to get us very far in characterising principles they could be held to share. Again, Jackson is always free to answer this kind of claim by denying that such people share a moral language, and he might be right to suggest that such people would never agree on much of moral weight under ordinary circumstances, but this would give up way too soon on our being able to say anything about how people with different views might interact morally, in moral disagreements and actions, and the changes in views that each might bring to the other.

The restrictiveness and conservativeness of Jackson's approach lies in the idea that unless moral agents start with a sufficiently similar starting point, and can be expected to reach a totally similar ending point, then we won't have much more to say about them.[15] This reduces moral conflict to a friendly endeavour between harmlessly disagreeing thinkers, and completely ignores the ways that understanding people's differing circumstances may be essential to understanding their moral views. The weakness of this approach is compounded by the suggestion that agents should be expected to converge on a mature folk morality through the methods of debate and critical reflection. This utterly fails to acknowledge the role of research, evidence, experience, and changing worldviews in moral development. It also glosses over the immense social problems with the methods Jackson does allow, such as problems of who is heard in debate, what kinds of things are taken as evidence, and what is available for agents to reflect on.

Of course, Jackson is just one example of a philosopher who talks of treating our moral attitudes as a starting point, and is perhaps an idiosyncratic example. However, I hope this discussion has revealed some of the more general limitations of simply speaking of our moral attitudes as the starting point of moral philosophy: it fails to pay sufficient attention to how we have reached our differing starting points, it relegates a whole lot of activity prior to whatever we identify as our starting point to the status of non-philosophical activity, not philosophically interesting. It tells us nothing about what methods are to be employed to move beyond our starting point, and it leaves unanswered the question of how to understand and interact with those who do not share our starting point. Such methodologies will tend to privilege and reproduce socially dominant moral views, by simply assuming the unquestioned prevalence of such views,

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15 It may not be that he believes there is nothing to say about such cases, but my point is just that he doesn't feel the need to say anything about such cases, where I would suggest they are absolutely crucial, and may characterise all interesting cases of moral disagreement.

and not providing the right resources to challenge them.

A moral philosopher may take their moral attitudes as some sort of privileged evidence for moral theories. This Evidence view sees our moral attitudes, particularly our intuitions, as the material which tends to justify our belief in particular moral theories, and on the basis of which we develop and choose between moral theories, sometimes with explicit analogy to the role of observation in forming scientific theories. This seems to describe the approach to moral attitudes in many versions of reflective equilibrium. In some ways this view might not be too distinct from the previous view; they both see our moral attitudes as material to be synthesised into a single coherent theory. However, the Evidence view seems to allow a lot more nuance and flexibility than at least the elaboration I've given of the Starting Point view.

The idea of moral attitudes as evidence allows us to attend to the idea that evidence must be collected, explored and interpreted. Our moral attitudes do not simply come to us, in their totality, clear and transparent, ready to be systematised. As with observation, we must seek out the evidence, make choices about what kinds of evidence to find, and what is relevant to particular investigations. If we take seriously the idea of our moral attitudes being (merely) the starting point of philosophy, we have to either ignore these processes, or refuse to count them as a part of philosophical activity. Of course, this oversight may just be an artificial oddness arising from the rhetoric of the 'starting point.'

An Evidence approach to moral attitudes and intuitions also importantly introduces the possibility of iterability, the possibility that our moral attitudes might change during the course of moral philosophy, and so provide new inputs for the process. By the definition of methodological conservatism I've given, it seems iterability could bring us a less conservative methodology if the moral attitudes we hold before the process of moral philosophy begins hold no more privileged role than the new ones we acquire and deploy during the process. How non-conservative this is seems to depend on what the processes are, and how they influence our moral attitudes, and so how different the iterated attitudes are from the original ones.

In practice, iterability often seems to do less work than it is touted to. Often, original unmodified moral attitudes seem to get held back, to be a final arbiter on whether the final moral theory as acceptable or not (though this may be the influence of the Desiderata view of moral

attitudes, which I will discuss next). Part of the problem here may result from the limitations of iterability when academic moral philosophy is understood to be a cooperative activity.

Suppose I have worked at developing my moral theories and attitudes for a while, to the point that they are quite different to yours. Now, if I want to discuss my moral theories with you, but, crucially, my only evidence consists in moral attitudes, I'm not going to get very far unless I find a point of connection between our moral attitudes. Most obviously, I could try to return to what my attitudes *used* to be, hoping they will be the same as what yours now are or used to be, and then try to work through the changes I went through, to demonstrate how I reached my final set of theories and attitudes. However, this limits me in two ways: firstly, practically speaking, I would only be able to lead you through a certain amount of this process. I can't expect to take you through more of my thinking that I could express in a few books, and I will particularly be in trouble if something like taking time for new attitudes to sink in is supposed to be part of the process. There is no prima facie reason to suppose that the amount of work required to get from a person's initial attitudes to a stable and satisfactory resting point will be so contained, or so quick.

Secondly, we might not have much reason to suppose that I possibly *could* lead you through a process mirroring my own moral development in this way. This will of course depend on the kinds of processes that our attitudes are supposed to undergo, but to use a concrete example, most elaborations of reflective equilibrium recognise that when we are faced with the necessity of either revising our intuitions or adjusting our theory, we cannot expect "knock-down judgement-trumping reasoning"[16] to determine our decision. Rather, judgements and choices will have to be made – a great number of them, for any sufficiently lengthy process of theory building – and I have no guarantee that you will go the same way as me in any of these choices. Indeed, given differences in people's background experiences, the strength of their attitudes, their assumptions, their temperaments, and their senses of what is important, we can expect huge divergence very quickly.

Both of these issues could be mitigated by changing how we see moral philosophy. On the one hand, we could retreat to seeing it as a primarily solitary exercise; I engage in moral philosophy to improve my own views, and it is no problem for philosophy if others can't follow my reasoning. Of course, this may render moral philosophy more conservative in another way, by limiting my exposure to unfamiliar views, limiting the existence or effect of challenges to my

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16 Knight (2006) "The Method of Reflective Equilibrium: Wide, Radical, Fallible, Plausible," in *Philosophical Papers* 35:2, p. 225

conclusions, and limiting the effect of my conclusions on the world. On the other hand, we could continue to see moral philosophy as a cooperative activity, but understand it to be a very slow, generational endeavour; I may be less concerned with the success of my arguments against other contemporary philosophers, and more concerned having some slight cultural impact on those to come, shifting their moral attitudes to better approximate a position where their own processes of moral reasoning can more reliably lead them towards moral truth. Of course, in this the process of moral philosophy comes to more closely resemble the general trajectory of moral change in our society. This may not be an unfortunate or inaccurate conception of moral philosophy, but would seem to be giving up on philosophy's aspiration to be a particularly good way to reach (moral) truth, and may look like philosophy is only following the moral change of society, rather than doing anything to lead it, or surpass it (which I take to be an ultimately conservative position).

Moving away from the issue of iterability, another important aspect for our assessment of Evidence views about moral attitudes is the question of how defeasible we take that evidence to be, and how we get at the evidence. Is introspective access to our attitudes supposed to be infallible, or might we accept claims of the form "you only *think* you have that attitude," say, for example, in cases in which a person's inegalitarian implicit biases seem to be at odds with their explicitly egalitarian intuitions? Would we take people's repeated actions to be straightforward evidence of their moral attitudes? Would we only pay attention to the attitudes that people actually hold, or would there be room to consider how our attitudes may change if we were confronted with a moral emergency, if we were more informed about relevant facts, or even if we underwent some radical morally transformative experience?[17] I take it that giving us more space to employ a wider range of resources to understand and critically challenge our own attitudes will help lead away from some of the conservative implications of giving a central evidential role to our attitudes.

A related detail is the question of what, exactly, our moral attitudes are taken to be evidence *of*. When thinking of moral attitudes as evidence in moral theory it is natural to assume that the claim being made is along the lines of 'that I intuit x is evidence for x,' or 'that I am repulsed by x is evidence that x is bad,' etc. But of course, our moral beliefs may be an important kind of evidence without being evidence *for* what is *believed*. It may be crucially important for moral theories to take note of what people actually believe, without thereby endorsing those beliefs. For example, in

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17 I address this question in chapter 6.

feminist ethics, it would be difficult to advance a theory of patriarchal culture without discussing how patriarchal moral attitudes are held and promoted by people at large. Similarly, careful consideration of my own problematic moral attitudes may be essential to seeing how these attitudes have operated, how they should be overcome, and the exact reasons why they *should* be overcome. Though more often applied to the sciences, where a researcher's attitudes have traditionally not been taken to be a source of evidence for research projects, the notion of "strong reflexivity," that idea that our own attitudes and beliefs are a part of the subject matter for investigation, forms an essential part of standpoint epistemology.[18] To make room for these uses of moral attitudes as evidence, I take only those views that privilege an attitude in favour of x as evidence *for* x (or that x is good) to be methodologically conservative.

As a final point, perhaps one may count moral beliefs as evidence for some view without giving any special privileged status to that evidence. One may take it that their belief that x tends to indicate that x is true, but also be prepared to weigh this against other kinds of evidence, such as empirical evidence about consequences, testimony from affected parties, structural analysis of relevant moral factors, etc.

This possibility looks similar to a difference that characterises what has been called radical reflective equilibrium, as opposed to conservative reflective equilibrium.[19] These views attempt to accommodate the ways that revisions in a thinker's moral views may result from a range of experiences, such as "living through a situation in which serious moral choices must be made, vividly imagining such circumstances (perhaps by way of literature, theatre, or films), coming into intimate contact with people who accept very different systems of value or suddenly understanding or appreciating such a system, listening to music, viewing paintings, or perhaps even mystical experiences and experiences of the divine or sublime,"[20] as well as more mundane, everyday experiences.

However, it's often not clear what the relation is supposed to be between these experiences, and the more familiar evidence of moral intuitions. Michael R. DePaul admits, in advocating this kind of theory, "I do not see how one might go about categorizing such experiences nor is it clear how the changes they effect in a person's moral beliefs should be evaluated."[21] DePaul is concerned

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18 Harding (1993), "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology," in *Feminist Epistemologies,* eds. Alcoff & Potter (Routledge: New York), p. 69-72. I discuss standpoint epistemology in more detail in chapter 5.
19 These terms are from DePaul (1987) "Two Conceptions of Coherence Method in Ethics" in *Mind* 96:384. Note that "Radical" Reflective Equilibrium does not provide quite the same difference as "Wide" Reflective Equilibrium.
20 DePaul (1987), p. 470.
21 DePaul (1987), p. 470.

with capturing the importance of these experiences, and even believes that these experiences are "just about a necessary condition for achieving a point of reflective equilibrium of which a person can justifiably be confident," but nonethless he seems to see the process of changing one's beliefs as a result of such experiences to be quite mysterious in comparison to the more central and obviously evaluable, albeit less common, process of changing one's beliefs on the basis of resolving conflicts between one's moral judgements and philosophical views - the more familiar process of reflective equilibrium. He sees this difference even in some cases where the transformative experience came as a result of reading a philosopher like Nietzsche or Marx.[22]

Carl Knight is perhaps a little clearer about the relation between the moral attitudes we use in reflective equilibrium, and other experiences which may effect our moral views. Firstly, it's worth noting that he claims "each individual undergoing the radical reflective process is required to engage in all (available) activities that may offset any of her formative biases."[23] This places these experiences as a necessary *part* of reflective equilibrium, rather than some semi-optional adjunct that we need to make room for. However, he also claims that "the move to radical reflective equilibrium... is intended to boost the epistemological standing of the judgements of the person undergoing reflective equilibrium."[24] This very clearly places these experiences in a kind of subordinate epistemological role to the evidence of our moral attitudes. Wider sources of evidence can be relevant, but only insofar as they ultimately work to change our attitudes, or undermine them. In the terms I've been using, it looks like these views give some epistemological status to evidence other than our moral attitudes, but leaves our moral attitudes with a privileged epistemic status, as the kind of evidence that all other evidence must speak to.

By the definition I've given, this would make us class these views, both "conservative" and "radical" reflective equilibrium, as quite methodologically conservative. But of course, as intended, radical reflective equilibrium does seem to be less conservative than conservative reflective equilibrium, especially in the suggestion that actually seeking out experiences to challenge your views may be an important part of coming to the right moral theory, and perhaps even a part of the process of reflective equilibrium. Nonetheless, I would want to question why these experiences should be relegated to a position of secondary epistemic and philosophical importance, to where philosophers will "not tend to pay more than lip service to them" (as DePaul characterises their

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22 DePaul (1987), p. 468-470.
23 Knight (2006), p. 215.
24 Knight (2006), p. 215.

current status in philosophy),[25] rather than being seen as centrally important as a potentially positive driving force behind the development of our moral views.[26]

I want to briefly address one kind of argument that may be used to defend the subordination of these experiences to our moral attitudes. One may argue 'of course we are only concerned with any kinds of experience or evidence insofar as they change our moral attitudes, because the whole point of moral philosophy is to change our moral attitudes; insofar as our moral attitudes remain unchanged, these experiences can't be philosophically relevant to our moral development.' There may be an element of truth to this, but I would first want to note that there is a difference between making room for non-philosophical experiences to change our moral attitudes, and making room for the actual conscious, principled employment of a wide range of sources of evidence to be used for developing our moral theory, *as a part* of philosophical activity. The idea of radical reflective equilibrium only seems to do the former, or at least fails to emphasise, explore, and explain the latter. Secondly, I suspect that requiring moral philosophy to change our own moral views may be too limited a conception of the possible goals of moral philosophy, which may include not only changing our beliefs, but also changing our actions, changing our reactions, changing other people's beliefs, building new concepts, creating space for new ways of seeing the moral landscape, exploring moral possibilities, and further goals.

Moral Attitudes as Desiderata

A moral philosopher may treat their moral attitudes as desiderata, or trumps. On this kind of view, part of what it takes for a moral theory to be good, successful, or plausible is that it produces, or leads us to moral verdicts that are identical or similar to our pre-existing moral intuitions. So, if we intuit "it is wrong to steal," then a moral theory that ends up telling us not to steal has more to be said for it than a moral theory that fails to issue that verdict. To give an example, Kwame Anthony Appiah has suggested that a moral theory's "plausibility comes from the ability to accommodate our intuitions."[27] However, we need not cash this idea out in terms of plausibility. One might count accommodation of our intuitions as a desiderata because of the thought that if we end up with radically unfamiliar moral verdicts, this could be a sign that we are no longer talking about morality per se, but rather our subject matter has changed. Alternatively, one might hold this commitment for practical or dialectical reasons, assuming that people would be unable to accept,

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25 DePaul (1987), p. 470
26 I explore this in more detail in chapter 6.
27 Appiah (2008), *Experiments in Ethics* (Harvard University Press: Massachusetts), p. 76.

embrace, or act on a moral theory which generated currently counterintuitive implications; this seems to express a deep pessimism about the plausibility or desirability of any kind of revolution in moral thinking.

Appiah goes on to claim that moral theory's "power comes from the ability to challenge still other intuitions."[28] This of course flags up that, on this kind of view, coherence with our intuitions may be just one desideratum among many. On these kinds of view, a theory's disagreement with specific intuitions may be outweighed by factors such as agreement with other intuitions, theoretical neatness or simplicity, or other theoretical pressures.

As a prominent example, in *Methods Of Ethics*, Henry Sidgwick is concerned with showing "that the Utilitarian estimate of consequences not only supports broadly the current moral rules, but also sustains their generally received limitations and qualifications," but also that Utilitarianism can provide moral guidance by solving folk morality's "difficulties and perplexities in general accordance with the vague instincts of Common Sense."[29] Inevitably, much of this discussion has a profoundly conservative air, as in, to take an example passage discussing the protection, upbringing, and training of children "it is commonly believed that the best or even the only known means of attaining these ends in even a tolerable degree is afforded by the existing institution of the Family, resting as it does on a basis of legal and moral rules combined."[30] Or another, before introducing the moral duty of charity in the case of unexpected emergency, "the main utilitarian reason why is not right for every rich man to distribute his superfluous wealth among the poor, is that the happiness of all is on the whole most promoted by maintaining in adults generally (except married women), the expectation that each will be thrown on his own resources for the supply of his own wants."[31] Or most blatantly, "it is only by the present severe enforcement against unchaste women of the penalties of social contempt and exclusion, resting on moral disapprobation, that the class of courtesans is kept sufficiently separate from the rest of female society to prevent the contagion of unchastity from spreading; and that the illicit intercourse of the sexes is restrained within such limits as not to interfere materially with the due development of the race."[32]

Sidgwick takes it to be important to demonstrate that the conclusions of utilitarian thinking

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28 Appiah (2008), p. 76.
29 Sidgwick (1901) *The Methods of Ethics* (MacMillan: London), p. 425.
30 Sidgwick (1901), p. 435. Of course, we may not want to blame Sidgwick for failing to predict the critiques of the traditional family institution, and particularly family law, that would become prominent in the century to come.
31 Sidgwick (1901), p. 436.
32 Sidgwick (1901), p. 452.

will not diverge greatly from the dictates of common sense or intuitional morality in order to prove Utilitarianism to an Intuitionalist, one who proclaims faith in Common Sense morality. This proof is supposed to work by demonstrating that the rules accepted by the Intuitionalist "have only a dependent and subordinate validity,"[33] and contain vagueness, indeterminacy and ambiguity that must be cleared up by reference to a further principle. "If systematic reflection upon the morality of Common Sense thus exhibits the Utilitarian principle as that to which Common Sense naturally appeals for that further development of its system which this same reflection shows to be necessary, the proof of Utilitarianism seems as complete as it can be."[34] So, Sidgwick wants to demonstrate that his moral theory leads to the conclusions of intuitional morality in order to convince Intuitionalists, by suggesting that they are actually already unconsciously or implicitly Utilitarians.[35]

What remains unclear is whether this concordance between the conclusions of Utilitarianism and common sense morality is necessary for the *truth* of Utilitarianism, or just for its demonstration. Suppose these conclusions significantly diverged (as indeed they actually may); would Sidgwick want to say that Utilitarianism is still true, but unfortunately we have lost a way of proving that to Intuitionalists, or is it part of what makes Utilitarianism a good theory that it does tend to accommodate our intuitions?

This idea of intuitions as desiderata may also best characterise Rawls' understanding of reflective equilibrium. In "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory" he writes "what justifies a conception of justice is not its being true to an order antecedent to and given to us, but its congruence with our deeper understanding of ourselves and our aspirations,"[36] and later that our pre-existing moral point of view "is that from which justice as fairness, and indeed any other doctrine, is to be assessed. Here the test is that of general and wide reflective equilibrium, that is, how well the view as a whole meshes with and articulates our more firmly considered convictions, at all levels of generality, after due examination, once all adjustments and revisions that seem compelling have been made."[37] These passages clearly suggest the use of our moral convictions as a kind of test against an already completed theory, as something that our theory must reach in

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33 Sidgwick (1901), p. 421.
34 Sidgwick (1901), p. 422. It must be said, the intense combination of misogyny, racism, classism, and stigmatisation of sex workers in just this short passage is staggering.
35 See also Sidgwick (1901), p. 387, where he offers a slightly different intuitional proof for Utilitarianism - reasoning from a few self-evident intuitions, rather than our whole collection of common sense moral beliefs - and rejects Mills' attempt to demonstrate Utilitarianism without such a proof.
36 Rawls (1980) "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," in *The Journal of Philosophy* 77:9, p.519.
37 Rawls (1980), p. 534.

order to be justified, rather than as material that we use in building up and constructing our theory in the first place (though I should emphasise, again, that these two uses are not mutually exclusive).

I take it that these two ways of being concerned with showing that our moral theories yield our pre-existing intuitions as judgements will tend to be quite conservative and limiting. They limit us to kinds of moral theory which can only go so far in challenging our prior attitudes, and methodologically exclude those radical theories that may insist we are importantly and widely wrong in our moral attitudes, and which demand deep, fundamental change. They rest on a conservative presumption that our intuitions and attitudes are already more or less right, and must be supposed to be right. They rest on a presumption that our moral world is already more or less in order, rather than deeply problematic; a claim that will seem downright bizarre to those whose lives are destroyed or crushed in ways that seem to be endorsed or permitted by currently prevailing moral systems.

That said, it is worth considering how some other philosophers could be deeply concerned with the relation between their moral theories and our pre-existing moral attitudes, without any kind of presupposition that those attitudes are in order, and without relying on those attitudes to justify their theories. A striking example of this can be seen in the methodology of R.M. Hare. As a Utilitarian, Hare was advocating a moral theory well known by his time to yield some deeply counterintuitive judgements. Although Hare is very clear in his view that our moral intuitions should not be the basis of moral of moral thinking,[38] he is nonetheless probably most well known for charting out the relationship between Utilitarianism and moral intuitions in such a way as to allow us to keep, and continue employing, some of our intuitions. He does this through the idea of a two-level moral theory, whereby we act on our intuitions in moments of moral emergency, but spend some of our more calm, reflective time examining those intuitions in accordance with Utilitarian principles, and refining or correcting them.[39]

Of course, this only gives intuition a place on the level of moral action and decision making, not on the level of theory justification. However, Hare also was concerned with something *like* the objection that Utilitarianism yields counterintuitive conclusions. For Hare, moral philosophy was about discovering what we mean by the moral terms we use (by consulting our linguistic, rather than moral, intuitions), and then determining what things we are logically led to

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38 Hare (1981), *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method, and Point* (Clarendon Press: Oxford) p. 12.
39 See Hare (1981), chapters 2 & 3.

hold we must do, given the meaning of our moral language. It would, then, be an obvious objection to any moral theory if that theory conflicted with our *linguistic* intuitions, and Hare accepts such objections.[40] However, what of the case more commonly raised against Utilitarianism, that it conflicts with our *moral* intuitions? Hare thinks such objections can be valid, in the following way:

Suppose we all intuit "it is wrong to steal." Now suppose I have a theory about the meaning of moral words, including the word "wrong," such that, if that theory were true, along with a whole lot of background understanding about what kind of people we are, our desires and aversions, and the form of our society, then it would be utterly baffling why we would believe "it is wrong to steal." This, Hare accepts, speaks against the theory. He is perhaps most clear about this when he writes "What if the analysis which is being advocated [of moral terms] makes the opinions of ordinary people, not indeed self-contradictory, but such that it is very strange that they should hold them? Or, putting it the other way around, it is a strong point in favour of an ethical theory if it enables a natural and readily acceptable explanation to be given of why people hold the moral opinions that they do, given that that is what they mean by them."[41]

This last sentence may sound exactly like taking congruence with our moral intuitions as a desiderata for a moral theory, but note that Hare emphasises strongly that "we do not have... to assume... that the moral opinions of ordinary people are correct; we have to assume only that they are the natural outcomes of the fact that people are as they are, on the hypothesis that the words have certain meanings."[42] Thus, we can meet this kind of objection not only by showing how the theory does generate our intuitions, but also by offering some kind of plausible explanation of why we might have those intuitions *despite* the truth of the theory. It is not a problem if the theory contradicts the content of our intuitions, but rather it is a problem if the theory contradicts *the fact of our having* those intuitions.

Although few philosophers would give much credence to Hare's entirely language-based approach to moral philosophy, I think this discussion of his methodology reveals an important way that philosophers legitimately can, and perhaps should, be interested in how our pre-existing moral attitudes cohere with our moral theories, without either conservatively assuming the truth of those attitudes, or limiting ourselves in principle to theories which can't take us very far from

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40 Hare (1981), p. 13.
41 Hare (1971), "The Argument from Recieved Opinion" in *Essays on Philosophical Method* (Macmillan: London), p. 125.
42 Hare (1981), p. 14.

our original beliefs: there may be value in providing theories of error about our beliefs. That is, not theories that show our beliefs to be wrong, but theories that explain to us *why* we hold or held those beliefs *despite* their being wrong; theories which demonstrate to us why we were in error. I do not think we would have to assume that unexplained beliefs have some prima facie epistemic weight in order to see that such theories of error can add to the completeness and plausibility of our overall moral theory. Without such theories, something important to moral philosophy is left unexplained.

In the following chapter, I step away from these particular ways that intuition may feature in our moral methodologies, and more generally examine three broad arguments against the use of intuition in moral philosophy, each of which is advanced on the basis of a different theory of theory of error for our pre-existing moral beliefs. I discuss the merits of these various theories of error, and draw out what particular moral implications and methodologies they may lead us towards.

CHAPTER 2 - THREE APPROACHES TO GENEALOGICAL CRITIQUE

Though many of the most widespread methodologies in moral philosophy give a prominant role to pre-theoretical, intuitional judgements, there are many philosophers who have argued, for fairly diverse reasons, that our intuitions should not be relied on. One fairly obvious and straightforward objection to the frequent use of intuition in moral philosophy is simply that our intuitions may be widely and systematically mistaken, such that any theory built on them will be liable to perpetuate, rather than correct these mistakes. This kind of objection, in some forms, will cast suspicion not just on intuitions, but on the central use of *any* kind of immediate, pre-theoretical attitudes, such as admiration and revulsion, in crafting moral theories, by suggesting that these attitudes, too, may be conditioned by some systematic influences which lead us astray. Obviously there is much that needs to be filled out in such an objection. One issue in particular is that, in making the sceptical claim that our intuitions might be mistaken, it does not seem to be enough to merely suggest this as a possibility. Rather, we are called upon to tell some kind of story to suggest how the particular beliefs or dispositions that constitute our moral intuitions are particularly liable to be mistaken, or how we came to have these false beliefs.

As a matter of fact, there is no shortage of such stories in the philosophical literature. These stories can identify the source of our mistaken attitudes in a number of different places. In what follows, I broadly group these stories into three distinct approaches (without meaning to suggest that this classification is exhaustive), each of which has its own advantages and disadvantages for those interested in critiquing or reforming the methodology of moral philosophy, and each of which could, if sustained, prompt a different response; different in terms of the kind of philosophical project or methodology it may support, different in terms of the kind of moral beliefs it could lead us to abandon or adopt, and different in terms of the practical moral behaviours it may demand of us. I call these three approaches the historical approach, the evolutionary approach, and the social approach, and will discuss each in turn, ultimately focusing on the social approach. Of course, bear in mind that these approaches need not be undertaken exclusively of one another. Indeed, in some ways they may be mutually supporting.[1]

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1 An interesting example of a discussion that blends the historical and social approach appears in Flikschuh (2014), "The Idea of Philosophical Fieldwork: Global Justice, Moral Ignorance, And Intellectual Attitudes," *The Journal of Philosophy* 22:1. Similarly, Nathaniel Adam Tobias ~~Coleman~~'s work on the philosophy of slavery has employed a great deal of historical detail and awareness within a critical theoretic approach.

The historical approach is to note that our intuitions and many moral attitudes are, by-and-large, the result of particular, no longer held religious, superstitious, or political beliefs, and so to argue that these intuitions are just as likely to be in error as the beliefs they were based on, or that we are acting irrationally by holding on to these moral beliefs when their foundations have been stripped away. Peter Singer briefly employs this approach in arguing against the practice of reflective equilibrium, particularly against the assumption that our particular, pre-theoretical moral judgements can serve as fixed points in theorising:

> Why should we not rather make the opposite assumption, that all the particular moral judgments we intuitively make are likely to derive from discarded religious systems, from warped views of sex and bodily functions, or from customs necessary for the survival of the group in social and economic circumstances that now lie in the distant past? In which case, it would be best to forget all about our particular moral judgments[2]

Brandt also briefly employs this approach, quoting Singer, as part of a larger, sometimes piecemeal argument against the use of intuition in moral philosophy, adding:

> What we should aim to do is step outside our own tradition somehow, see it from the outside, and evaluate it, separating what is only the vestige of a possibly once useful moral tradition from what is justifiable at present. The method of intuitions in principle prohibits our doing this.[3]

In both of these cases, the critique is confined to a single paragraph. In both cases, the accuracy of the critique is assumed to be obvious, and so the immediate move to rejecting our particular moral judgements is assumed to be desirable. The problem immediately raised is whether some alternate methodology, which will constitute stepping outside our tradition, is possible, which Singer, questionably, takes himself to have already shown through the course of his paper, and which Brandt takes as his task for the rest of his book. That is to say, in these cases the historical critique of intuition is roughly and briefly sketched, in order to prompt a rejection of intuitional methodology, and then basically forgotten, as it plays no part in the ongoing philosophical project (which, after all, is taken to be now free from the use of intuitions, and so, according to this limited critique, free from the pernicious influence of the rejected tradition).

Of course, this is not to say that the historical critique must proceed this way. Most

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2   Singer, (1974) "Sidgwick and Reflective Equilibrium," *The Monist,* 58, p. 516
3   Brandt, (1979) *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Clarendon Press: Oxford) p. 21-22.

obviously, Nietzsche engages in a very extensive version of this critique in *On The Genealogy Of Morals*. Nonetheless, there is something about the familiarity, and perhaps obviousness, of this approach, which seems to lend itself to quick, dismissive treatments.

For those interested in presenting a serious challenge to the standard methodology of moral philosophy, the historical approach has some fairly serious limitations. The first is that it may be reasonably easy to incorporate this kind of critique into the intuitionist's toolkit. Every philosophical methodology based on intuition must acknowledge that our intuitions are sometimes wrong, and may need to be examined and refined, to weed out the distorting influence of things like self-interest, phobias, and, perhaps most importantly, false empirical beliefs. For example, if I intuit that it is wrong to donate money to charity only because it has been drilled into me that, as a matter of fact, giving money to charity tends to counterproductively foster dependence, then anyone would agree that the truth of my empirical belief, that charities are counterproductive, is highly relevant to the reliability of my intuition.

With this in mind, the situation of our intuitions being based on no longer held religious or political beliefs appears to just be a slightly grand, historical case of intuition based on false empirical beliefs, albeit an unusual one, where the false beliefs are no longer held, but the intuition is yet to be updated on the basis of new beliefs. So the intuitionist may be able to suggest a solution to this situation, such as evaluating the intuition while firming holding the falsity of the superstition in mind. This would be, at most, a very slight departure from ordinary, introspective, intuitional methodology.

We may very reasonably question whether this kind of procedure would actually work, but, at least in the brief form presented by Singer, the historical critique provides no particular reason to doubt that it should. Why would a dead religious or historical belief be more intractable than a dead economic, or biological belief? If I use a computer simulation to demonstrate, to a gambler, that she is wrong to stick with her first choice in situations akin to the Monty Hall Problem[4], I can expect her to update her beliefs, and her actions, in light of this new information. Why should the situation be different for moral beliefs based on superstition? In fact, I suspect this question could be answered, but the answer would take us beyond a brief presentation of the historical critique, and probably towards an explanation from psychology, or in terms of the third, social approach I will discuss.

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4   A famously counterintuitive result in statistics.

Peter Singer does address the possibility that his brief historical critique could be incorporated into the methodology of reflective equilibrium, describing his critique as a "limiting case, in which there are no moral judgments that survive consideration,"[5] and arguing that the ordinary practice of reflective equilibrium would be unlikely to ever actually reach such a limiting case, and so cannot be said to be taking the historical critique seriously. The problem here is that Singer seems to overestimate the power of the historical critique, and so too the conclusions that it must lead us to. Singer supposes that taking seriously the fact that some of our moral beliefs have been formed in the light of now outdated and rejected superstitious beliefs must lead us to assume that *all* of our moral beliefs were, or may as well have been, so formed, and that *none* are reliable. However, this seems unwarranted. It is common, in discussions of moral intuitions, to cite the extremely widely shared belief that torturing babies for fun is morally unacceptable. This is partly because it simply seems implausible that any of us *only* hold this belief because of an outdated historical tradition, and arguing otherwise would be, at least, very uncomfortable.

This brings us neatly to a second major limitation of the historical approach: intuitionists may often plausibly deny that the moral intuitions in question truly were derived from the outdated religious belief and superstitions *rather than* vice versa. In particular, if we come to see a particular religious tradition to be mistaken, then it looks particularly plausible that the religion had the form that it did, including rules like 'don't murder' and the Golden Rule, precisely because people were already inclined towards certain beliefs, and to intuitively believe these particular moral rules.[6] After all, having rejected the metaphysical edifice of the religious belief, we no longer can admit that these rules came from a source such as divine revelation, so where else might they have come from? In some cases, that they already had some kind of intuitive grip may be the most plausible answer. For course, we may then ask whether a completely unexplained intuition is really any more reliable than one for which we can provide a debunking explanation, but this line of thought would make the historical approach somewhat redundant.

THE EVOLUTIONARY APPROACH

A second approach to the genealogical critique of intuition is the evolutionary approach. This rather empirical approach is associated with experimental philosophers. Through a combination of

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5   Singer (1974), p. 516.
6   Derek Parfit implicitly makes this point, when he claims that the Golden Rule was "independently *discovered* in at least three of the world's earliest civilizations," in Parfit (2011) *On What Matters,* Volume 1 (Clarendon Press: Oxford) p. 321, emphasis mine.

experiments designed to test subjects' moral reactions to various situations, neurological methods, and speculation about the evolutionary history of human development, the evolutionary critique aims to demonstrate that our intuitions are largely shaped by psychological adaptations to no longer existing, and perhaps no longer relevant, evolutionary pressures. This approach draws on a variety of empirical results, not all of which were established specifically in order to build this critique.

For example, those making this evolutionary critique may point to experimental results which demonstrate that feelings of disgust, manipulated by the experimental set-up, can strongly influence subjects' moral judgments regarding some scenario, even when those feelings are not connected to the scenario itself.[7] They may try to combine this result with some claim about irrelevance or arbitrariness of feelings of disgust to reach the conclusion that intuitions, so easily swayed by irrelevant factors, cannot be a reliable source of evidence for, or foundation of, moral claims. For another example, a philosopher may argue, on the basis of speculation about our evolutionary history, combined with some game-theoretic arguments, that our moral intuitions are sensitive to violent, direct action in a way that they are not sensitive to indirect actions, like flipping a switch, due to the major role violence played in our evolutionary past. From this, they may argue that our intuitions are not reliable when dealing with evaluation of the kinds of scenarios we encounter in modern life.[8]

The implication in some, though not all, of this work is that none of our intuitive moral judgements could be free from these seemingly irrelevant influences. One reason this approach looks to be more powerful than the historical approach is that it looks harder to incorporate these criticisms raised against intuition into the normal business of reflective equilibrium, or critiquing and refining intuitions. This is because the kind of influences revealed by this approach will cover more area, and be more subtle in their effects. It may be reasonably easy to find some neat list of moral concerns that are particularly likely to have been influenced by, say, a Christian tradition, but the kinds of influences revealed by the evolutionary approach, such as the influence of a person's background levels of disgust on their moral judgment, are inevitably going to influence all moral judgements, rather than only those in some particular domain. Furthermore, any attempt to account for these influences may also be harder, as, to stick with the disgust example, there may

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7   As in Schnall, et al, (2008) "Disgust as Embodied Moral Judgment," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34 (8).
8   Peter Singer makes this kind of argument, along with many others following the evolutionary approach, and some more from the historical approach, in Singer (2005), "Ethics and Intuitions," *The Journal of Ethics* 9.

be no obvious baseline level of disgust to treat as an unmarked case, a case where judgement is not being distorted.

One philosopher who does try to combine and reconcile an evolutionary critique of (some) intuitions with something resembling the ordinary practice of reflective equilibrium is Kwame Anthony Appiah. Appiah is sometimes very critical of the role of intuition in moral philosophy, and ultimately holds a somewhat conflicted view, best illustrated by his claim, of moral theories, that "if their plausibility comes from the ability to accommodate our intuitions, their power comes from the ability to challenge still other intuitions."[9] Of evolutionary critique, on the one hand he agrees that if we can trace the character of some moral intuition back to some evolutionary distorting influence, then we should reject that intuition. Nonetheless he maintains that the claim "if something seems intuitively wrong and you have no special knowledge that suggests your moral intuition is distorted, you shouldn't do it" is actually "a constitutive element of the very idea of wrongness."[10] Thus, in Appiah's methodology, evolutionary critique is used to question specific intuitions, while leaving a general, foundational reliance on intuition untouched.

However, Appiah's approach is convincing challenged by Edouard Machery. In Machery's words, Appiah seems to propose that "knowing the nature of the mechanisms that deliver our moral intuitions... can enable philosophers to evaluate whether these intuitions are genuine or whether they should be jettisoned."[11] However, Machery argues that Appiah provides no principled, non-circular way of declaring some method of forming an intuition to be the result of a distorting influence, and some other method of forming an intuition to be evidence of sound, valid moral judgment. As an example, Machery cites de Brigard's evidence that peoples' judgments regarding the Experience Machine thought experiment might be influenced by a conservative bias in favour of the status quo.[12] However, he argues, Appiah gives us no grounds, and could not non-circularly give any grounds, on which to judge whether conservativeness is a distorting factor, which should lead us to reject this intuition, or rather a genuinely important moral factor, which leads us to a correct intuition.[13]

Like the historical approach, the evolutionary approach has some limitations, from the

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9   Appiah (2008), *Experiments in Ethics* (Harvard University Press: Massachusetts), p. 76.
10   Appiah (2008), p. 112.
11   Machery (2010) "The Bleak Implications of Moral Psychology," *Neuroethics* 3, p. 228
12   See De Brigard (2010), "If you like it, does it matter if it's real?" *Philosophical Psychology* 23:1.
13   One interesting possibility Machery fails to discuss is that an influence such as the bias towards the status quo could be seen as a distorting influence just in case it also demonstrably leads to incorrect results in cases of non-moral, non-ethical judgment.

perspective of those who want to challenge the standard methodology in moral philosophy. One is just that it may be, in a sense, too powerful. Rather than just problematising the intuitions on which we base our moral theories, some see this kind of evolutionary critique as undermining morality as a whole, showing the entire business of modifying our own behaviour in response to the concerns of others to be entirely rooted in arational and unjustifiable psychological tendencies. Thus, this approach may incline us towards a full-blown error theory of morality. This path is taken by Richard Joyce, who argues that knowledge of evolution should undermine our belief in the truth of all moral claims, by providing a plausible genealogy of our moral practices and attitudes which does not vindicate the truth of moral claims.[14]

On the other hand, one may react to evidence for the evolutionary basis of morality by arguing that morality simply *is* this collection of evolutionarily based psychological tendencies – and their manifestation in our modern environment and society – and that moral philosophy is just in the business of charting and tidying up these tendencies. Though this position may be thought to involve a fairly radical departure from the usual characterisation and self-understanding of the business of moral philosophy, there is a sense in which it is a deeply morally conservative position, insofar as it refuses to go much beyond the moral beliefs that we happen to start with, and completely cuts off the possibility of any radical revaluation of our normative attitudes.

I suspect the evolutionary approach can encourage this kind of conservatism by, on the one hand, providing evidence that there is some kind of psychologically common, deeply rooted human moral nature to be studied, rather than just a jumble of culturally influenced beliefs and attitudes, and, on the other hand, by suggesting a debunking explanation of any loftier goals for ethics; both by suggesting that we only feel the pull towards a radical, potentially revisionary ethics due to these evolutionary factors, and by suggesting that any methodology which attempts to develop such a revisionary ethics will struggle to face the systematic influence, on our moral judgement, of these psychological tendencies.

Though he advocates studying morality empirically, rather than intuitively, an example of this kind of moral conservatism, which identifies the content of morality simply with those moral tendencies promoted by our evolutionary history, can be seen in the work of Michael Ruse.[15] Of course, the boundary between what constitutes an evolutionary moral conservatism and an

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14   In Joyce, (2006) *The Evolution of Morality* (MIT Press, Massachusetts), particularly chapter 6.
15   For example, in Ruse & Wilson (1986).

evolutionary moral scepticism is not entirely stable. One might argue that any view that simply reads moral facts off of empirical facts about evolution has simply given up talking about genuine moral facts; David L. Hull points out that most philosophers will see an evolutionary epistemology or ethics as "the abandonment of these endeavours as they have been traditionally construed."[16]

Ultimately, I think that this kind of challenge, from psychological data and evolutionary speculation, could be important, and must be met by any realist moral theory which wants to allow for the possibility that morality may be a radical source of practical demands and guidance. Furthermore, I see the increased interest in empirical study of the methods of, and influences on, ordinary moral judgment as important, useful, and desirable. Nonetheless, in what follows I want to focus on the third approach to the genealogical critique of intuition, the social approach, which I see lending itself to more practical, less meta-ethical considerations.

THE SOCIAL APPROACH AND EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

This approach to the genealogical critique is markedly different from the previous two approaches insofar as it doesn't just see our intuitions as leftover relics of a distant past, but rather as beliefs and attitudes created by and *maintained* by continuing systematic influences. In particular, the concern is with systems of oppression and privilege, which may be created by, perpetuated by, and manifest in economic, political, social, cultural and legal factors (among, perhaps, others). The kinds of attitudes discussed include prejudice, stereotype, ideology, false consciousness, and implicit bias. These factors are partly the subject matter of a collection of related fields of academic study including feminism, critical race theory, and some forms of Marxist theory.[17]

There is a wide range of conceptual resources available to help one develop this approach, which brings some advantages and some disadvantages. One advantage is that there is an

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16 Hull (1988), review of Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously*, in *Ethics* 98:2.

17 I had previously collectively referred to such theories under the name "critical theory," but have moved away from that for a number of reasons. These include the strong association, particular within philosophy, between the term "critical theory" and the particular approach of what is known as the "Frankfurt school" of critical theory. In particular, I found that the account of what it takes to be a critical theory provided by Raymond Geuss's *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (focusing on the Frankfurt school and its inheritors), though somewhat appropriate in its insistence that "Critical theories aim at emancipation and enlightenment, at making agents aware of hidden coercion," (p. 55), was otherwise too specific, making a few epistemological and methodological claims that may not necessarily be supported by all of the theories I wish to include. (Geuss (1981), *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge)) For example, Geuss argues a critical theory must be self-referential, "part of the object-domain which it describes," (p. 55). Though this feature is central to the feminist standpoint epistemology which I describe and advocate in chapter 5, I believe it need not be a part of all the feminist theories I discuss in *this* chapter, for that theory to be considered genuinely feminist. Ultimately, I think my own philosophical work, in this thesis, could be considered to be critical theory, but I have not been sufficiently familiar with the term, or its history, to make much of this connection through this thesis.

enormous wealth of material that can be drawn upon to motivate, develop, and respond to this critique, from Marxist thought, feminist philosophy, critical race theory, queer theory, and related fields. A possible disadvantage lies in the difficulty of managing, or restricting the scope. The various factors which social theory identifies as leading to problematic cultural attitudes are complicated even in isolation, and tend to interact in complex ways, making any simple or brief discussion of these problems inevitably doomed to be over-simplistic. The social approach certainly does not lend itself to being briefly raised as a sceptical argument, then immediately forgotten, as we saw the historical approach used. Of course, this resistance to brevity could certainly be seen as an advantage, as it may force us to think through the full implications of our critique (rather than allowing us to replace one set of criticised attitudes with another, which may ultimately fall to the very same critique, as seems to be the case with Singer's rejection of intuition in favour of "self-evident principles"[18]). It may also provide us with further guidance as to where to look for an alternative methodology, one resistant to the problems it raises, rather than simply leaving us with the old methodology torn down.

It should be fairly obvious how those intellectual resources which aim to demonstrate how our beliefs and attitudes can be shaped by systems of oppression could be used to challenge the use of intuitions, or similar attitudes, in moral philosophy. Insofar as these resources reveal some of our beliefs to be inaccurate (or, in some cases, such as cases of stereotype threat, true because self-fulfilling), ideological, or morally problematic, they should fairly straightforwardly cast doubt upon any methodology that gives a central, foundational role to such beliefs. Nonetheless, explicitly methodological criticism of the practice of moral philosophers along these lines is not so familiar in what I take to be the *mainstream* of moral philosophy as either of the two approaches previously discussed.[19] With that in mind, I will now demonstrate just one way that such a criticism may proceed, with reference to Miranda Fricker's discussion of epistemic injustice.[20]

Fricker identifies two kinds of phenomena as cases of epistemic injustice, both widespread in our society. The first is testimonial injustice, where "prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word." The second, which Fricker discusses less, is hermeneutical

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18 Singer (1974), p. 516-517. He does not discuss exactly why what strikes us as self-evident would be less historically conditioned than what strikes us as intuitive.
19 During the rest of this thesis I will discuss many texts which explicitly or implicitly make such a challenge from outside the mainstream of moral philosophy. One in particular is so relevant as to be worth mentioning here: Schwartzman (2012) "Intuition, Thought Experiments, and Philosophical Method: Feminism and Experimental Philosophy," *The Journal of Social Philosophy, 43: 3*.
20 Fricker, (2007) *Epistemic Injustice* (Oxford University Press: Oxford).

injustice, a situation wherein "a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences."[21] Both types of injustice are rooted in marginalisation, and the operation of social power.[22] Roughly speaking, testimonial injustice operates via well documented and widespread psychological effects, such as implicit bias and stereotype threat, which lead people to doubt the reliability, sincerity, and ability of members of marginalised groups, perhaps despite their holding explicit egalitarian beliefs. By Fricker's account, hermeneutical injustice operates primarily through the exclusion of oppressed groups from practices wherein they could contribute to creating social meaning, such as media, politics, law, and academia.

Fricker does not attempt, in *Epistemic Injustice*, to relate this work to the practices of philosophers and moral theorists, as her interests are primarily epistemological, secondarily moral, and rarely methodological. Nonetheless, making this connection should be a fairly straightforward matter. The implications of testimonial injustice, though hugely important, are not particularly unique or distinct to moral philosophy, or philosophy in general; the discounting, or disproportional challenging, of the claims, arguments and concerns of those labouring against testimonial injustice will obviously lead to the moral positions and ethical concerns that are particularly salient for such people being given less weight or less serious attention, whether they come to the attention of philosophers as moral claims typically advanced by members of marginalised groups, or more directly in the form of arguments made by minority philosophers. Meanwhile, the positions and concerns distinct to more privileged philosophers – white, male, middle-class academics – will be given a relatively free ride; less challenged, given more immediate credence, finding more widespread support.[23]

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21 These are both early definitions, from Fricker (2007), p. 1, and may be too simple, or otherwise flawed. In particular, I would question Fricker's restriction of hermeneutical injustice to cases of people trying to understand their *social* experiences. For example, difficulties encountered by a person born intersex in understanding their own body with the limited cultural resources available to them would seem to be a clear instance of hermeneutical injustice (as it is rooted in cultural and social marginalisation, serves the interest of a dominant ideology (the gender binary), and has systemic, unjust practical ramifications), but does not clearly involve an effort to make sense of *social* experience, unless our sense of "social experience" is broad enough to cover just about anything (as, perhaps, it should be, as I will discuss in relation to Harding's standpoint epistemology in chapter 5).

22 Her discussion of social power is mainly contained in Fricker (2007) chapter 1, particularly pages 9-17.

23 Though I don't plan to focus on it, there is an interesting question regarding how distinct philosophy might be in resisting this problem. Analytic philosophy is certainly a discipline that prides itself, with some justification, as being especially challenging. A philosopher may argue that no view or concern would be given a free pass in philosophy, whether it is presented by a white man or a woman of colour. Everything is challenged, everything needs to be justified. Though there may be some truth in that, it may not go very far in addressing the problem. Even if every philosopher is challenged, we would have to look at such factors as exactly what kinds of claims are seen as worth challenging, to what degree different philosophers are challenged, exactly how they are challenged (as helpful critique versus dismissal, deflection, or ad hominem attack), what is taken as an acceptable or successful response to such challenges, and whether wider support against such challenges is forthcoming. I see no particular

The implications of hermeneutical injustice bear more specifically on the intuitional methodology of moral philosophy. Fricker discusses how hermeneutical injustice renders individuals' experiences "obscure, even unspeakable," shareable only through "half-formed understandings" employing "ill-fitting meanings."[24] She illustrates this kind of situation, and some of the problems it can cause, through the real-life example of women struggling to understand the experiences we now call 'sexual harassment,' before these experiences were widely discussed, and before there was appropriate language readily available to easily discuss them.[25] Of particular interest is her suggestion that the reality of hermeneutical injustice was "positively disguised by the existing meaning attributed to the behaviour ('flirting')," and that "the whole engine of collective social meaning was effectively geared to keeping these obscured experiences out of sight."[26]

This non-accidentally dismissive conceptualisation of behaviours, which we now understand to be sexual harassment, as 'flirting' would severely hamper any attempt to understand the ethical import of such behaviour, within philosophy, so long as the methods available to us were based on intuitive judgement. There are two important ways this is so.

Firstly, when we are led us to understand a set of behaviours as 'flirting,' even if we see them as particularly aggressive or persistent instances of flirting, it seems inevitable that our background understanding and assumptions about flirting will be triggered. These are assumptions such as that flirting is harmless, playful, reciprocal, personal, private, normal and natural. Fighting against these associations will make any attempt to judge the behaviour as morally wrong an uphill battle.

We could perhaps try to avoid this problem while still employing our intuitions by steadfastly refusing to see the case or thought experiment under consideration as an instance of a general category, such as 'flirting,' but rather to just intuitively evaluate it in all its specific details. However, there are problems with this approach. For one thing, it is doubtful to what extent we could consciously refrain from employing our ordinary concepts. For another, there is reason to expect that issues of hermeneutical injustice will also touch on how we understand the particular details; what was once understood as confidence, in the context of flirting, may now be understood as intimidation, as part of sexual harassment. Similarly, a focus on the details of a

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reason to assume philosophy will fare any better in these regards than any other academic discipline.
24 Fricker (2007), p. 148.
25 Fricker (2007), p. 149-155.
26 Fricker (2007), p. 153.

particular case may occlude some details relevant to our evaluation of some particular behaviour as an instance of a pattern of behaviour. For example, to see the harm of sexual harassment, we plausibly must understand it as a potentially widespread phenomenon, one that could not be easily or reliably avoided by, for instance, changing job. It plausibly must also be understood as something that women suffer from men (at some level of generality), with all of the structural analysis that entails. A third problem is that by refraining from performing any kind of general categorisation, we limit the scope of our ethical conclusions. We can no longer reach a conclusion like "this kind of act is wrong," but are limited to the much weaker "something wrong was done in this case."

A second important way that hermeneutical injustice will be problematic for moral philosophy is by influencing what kinds of cases come to the philosopher's attention in the first place. Insofar as a certain pattern of behaviour is conceptualised as 'flirting,' philosophers, including moral philosophers, are unlikely to pay much attention to it, seeing it as trivial, unimportant, insignificant. Insofar as there are *no* hermeneutical resources available to understand some phenomenon, not even ill-fitting ones, but only what Fricker calls a "hermeneutical lacuna,"[27] the situation may be even worse, as the opportunity to have an intuitional judgment of the phenomenon will not even arise; intuition will have no concepts to latch on to. This is not to say that philosophers could not *come* to see some such phenomenon as philosophically interesting, but just that the work of countering hermeneutical injustice would have to be done first.[28] Of course, the problem of what is considered philosophically interesting extends far beyond any particular way of doing ethics, and beyond moral philosophy.[29]

The question of what our response should be to epistemic injustice is a large one, and the answer will probably overlap significantly with similar questions regarding other kinds of injustice rooted in social power. Fricker's own answer to this question is somewhat limited, and shaped by her primary interest in epistemological issues.[30] With regard to both testimonial and

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27 Fricker (2007), p. 151.
28 Though obviously hard to diagnose ahead of time, it appears as though something like this kind of work has been collectively undertaken in the past few years with regard to the increased discussion of, and awareness of, online harassment and "bullying," which had previously been understood as "trolling," a mostly harmless, randomly-targeted, best-ignored practice, fuelled by boredom and anonymity, but is now increasingly being seen as a concerted, sometimes organised organised campaign of exclusion and intimidation, targeting marginalised groups, fuelled by misogyny, racism, and other oppressive attitudes, which systematically maintains online spaces as being exclusively *for* privileged groups (with obvious parallels to the case of sexual harassment). Needless to say, this hermeneutical work is *not* being led by academic moral philosophers. See Cross (2014b).
29 I will return to this problem later.
30 These discussions appear in Fricker (2007), chapter 4, p. 86-108, and a small part of chapter 7, p. 169-175

hermeneutical injustice, she considers only the response of an agent who, in the course of hearing testimony from a possibly marginalised speaker, becomes aware of the possibility that testimonial injustice is operating.[31] In both cases, she recommends the development of a different kind of epistemic virtue.

The first is a virtue of testimonial justice, which most basically involves neutralising the impact of prejudice in one's credibility judgements by consciously "compensating upwards to reach the degree of credibility that would have been given were it not for the prejudice."[32] The second is a virtue of hermeneutical justice, which involves a hearer revising upwards their judgement as to the "degree to which what is said *makes good sense."[33]* She stresses that, in practice, this will not just involve some internal revaluation, but rather may involve practices such as a more socially aware kind of listening and the seeking of corroborating evidence.

Nonetheless, both these virtues are corrective, in the sense that they aim to correct *for* epistemic injustice (not aiming directly to correct it) while leaving the patterns of epistemic activity in which these injustices manifest, and the underlying social and political causes, mostly untouched. This seems rather limited in two regards.

Firstly, it does not provide much guidance in epistemic contexts where prototypical exchanges of testimony do not play a major role, such as mainstream moral philosophy, and many other academic fields. Perhaps Fricker intended to restrict the scope of what she calls "epistemic injustice" only to those injustices which arise within testimonial contexts, with the implicit understanding that her theory could be supplemented with other work from the broad field of social and critical theory. Her contribution would still be significant, as testimonial exchanges do play a particularly huge and important role in some epistemic contexts which have huge practical and ethical ramifications; most obviously legal and bureaucratic contexts, as well as some political contexts. Fricker may be happy to acknowledge that some other "distinctively epistemic kind(s) of injustice"[34] exist.

Secondly, limiting our response to epistemic injustice to the development of *corrective* virtues seems somewhat unwarranted. Straightforwardly, to focus on hermeneutical injustice, it seems that a more wholehearted response to the observation that the exclusion of certain groups of

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31 It is particularly striking that she gives much less attention to the question of what the *speaker's* response could be, which may be a more interesting and important question, particularly in cases of hermeneutical injustice.
32 Fricker (2007), p. 92.
33 Fricker (2007), p. 170, italics hers.
34 Fricker (2007), p. 1.

people from hermeneutically valuable practices should involve some effort to combat that exclusion, perhaps by creating space for, and drawing attention to marginalised voices. Fricker briefly argues, in the last paragraph of the book, that the cultivation of a virtue of hermeneutical justice would go some way to eradicating hermeneutical injustice, by involving "the creation of a more inclusive hermeneutical micro-climate shared by hearer and speaker."[35] Nonetheless, as she acknowledges, this could hardly be enough to seriously combat the "unequal relations of social power more generally" which cause and sustain hermeneutical injustice; her virtues leave the macro-climate mostly untouched.

She defends this limitation by claiming that combating the underlying causes of epistemic injustice "takes more than virtuous individual conduct of any kind; it takes group political action for social change."[36] Fricker is probably right, here, to be passing the buck to more explicitly political theories regarding social change, but it nonetheless seems plausible that individual action undertaken as part of that collective effort may constitute good *epistemic* practice, rather than only good moral or political practice. Insofar as society's epistemic injustice has an epistemic cost for all individuals, hampering every individual's ability to reliably reach true belief when some evidence is hidden behind prejudice or hermeneutical lacunae, it seems plausible that broader, practical action to eliminate epistemic injustice, whether undertaken individually or collectively, could be seen as a part of good epistemic practice, as it helps us come to have true beliefs, and correct our false beliefs.

I hope to have shown how the social approach to genealogical critique could be advanced through the resources provided by Miranda Fricker's work on epistemic injustice. However, I should stress that this is just one way that such a critique could be developed. A wide range of other conceptual resources are also available, such as (to name just a few) invisibility, stereotype, false consciousness, privilege, and implicit bias, which would help develop this critique in different ways. Approaches focusing on these different concepts will often overlap significantly – for example, the concept of hermeneutical injustice shares some overlap with the concepts of invisibility and false consciousness – but together they will help paint a more complete picture of the factors which may distort our moral judgements, within philosophy and society more generally, and different concepts may be more suited to addressing particular issues within methodology (such as the role of intuitions, the subject matter of philosophical ethics, the kinds of

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35 Fricker (2007), p. 174.
36 Fricker (2007), p. 174.

arguments and evidence used in philosophical ethics, the demographics of philosophy and its effects on theory, etc.).

The differences between these three approaches is not limited to the differences in how a critique of intuitions or intuitional methodology is made, and the plausibility of these critiques. Each approach also carries a different set of assumptions and implications, may lead to different kinds of responses, prompting a different kind of philosophical project, and may support a different kind of adjustment to philosophical methodology.

In some ways, the implications of the social approach to genealogical critique of moral attitudes are less extreme than the implications of the other two approaches. Focusing on how these critiques may influence our understanding of intuitions, the social approach may appear less radical insofar as it seems to leave the basic meta-ethical assumption that intuitions *could* be a good guide to moral truth untouched.

When employed by someone like Singer, the historical approach suggests that our intuitions are shaped by morally irrelevant, shifting cultural factors, which are not adopted due to any strong connection to moral truth, and which we may later come to reject, and which therefore lack epistemic legitimacy. It constitutes a critique of intuition as a *whole*, rather than just of the intuitions that we happen to have, insofar as it seems to close off the possibility of a world where our intuitions are not influenced by these contingent, epistemically unreliable factors. A world without cultural influences on our moral beliefs is perhaps unimaginable, or at least so unlike our actual world as to make the intuitions we may counterfactually have in such a world seem irrelevant to us.

Similar thoughts apply to the evolutionary approach; our intuitional moral judgements seem so bound up in our arational psychological natures, formed in distant circumstances to meet no-longer-relevant challenges, that accounting for these influences seems impossible. Similarly, the moral judgements of creatures with psychologies entirely unlike our own may seem totally irrelevant.

In contrast, the social approach seems to leave open the possibility that our intuitions could be, or become, entirely free from the distorting influences it discusses, and so perhaps (turning on the outcome of a few more meta-ethical or moral epistemological arguments), a good guide to

moral truth. Though we perhaps can't hope for an opportunity to develop intuitional moral attitudes free from any historical contingency, or any innate psychological inclinations, we plausibly (hopefully) can hope for a world free from systematic social injustice.

Furthermore, insofar as this approach conceptualises the distorting influences on our moral attitudes through thick concepts such as "prejudices," and "biases," it may demand that we actually engage with and correct these attitudes, rather than simply ignoring them and putting them aside. That is to say, to a significant degree the social approach will cast our problematic moral attitudes as themselves a moral problem to be addressed, and so corrected, rather than *merely* as a methodological problem which gets in the way of our understanding some other moral problems. To put this another way, for some sufficiently broad ways of understanding what is involved in 'reflective equilibrium,' a social approach may actually demand that we engage in reflective equilibrium, rather than leading us to reject it.

Similarly, where the historical and evolutionary approaches can lend themselves to a kind of scepticism about morality as a whole, through the suggestion that our morality simply *is* this collection of non-justifying cultural or evolutionary influences, active engagement with the social approach seems to rule out this kind of scepticism from the start, as taking seriously the key, thick concepts, such as "oppression" and "injustice," involves some kind of moral commitment, some understanding of these forces as bad, wrong, or in need of redress. It seems that to engage with this approach, these theories, and these concepts without incurring any kind of moral commitment would require either denying that any oppression or injustice actually exists,[37] or employing these central concepts but failing to take them seriously.

However, despite the possibly more radical meta-ethical implications of the historical and evolutionary approaches, I would like to suggest that the challenge which a social approach presents to the currently practised methodology of moral philosophy actually has more significant implications than either of the two other approaches. However, first I will discuss how the meta-ethical issues raised by the historical approach may serve to draw philosophical attention away from more immediate, practical concerns, and so mute the effectiveness of the historical approach as a way of addressing our actual moral attitudes.

That the historical critique lends itself to a certain kind of sceptical project should be no surprise, given that we have come into this topic seeking to cast doubt upon some of our moral

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37 In chapter 6 I discuss what it may take for some people to achieve the starting point necessary to take a social critique seriously.

beliefs. However, inevitably this doubt is not contained to just those beliefs we actually have. Beyond leading us to reevaluate our particular moral beliefs, the historical critique tends to reveal, and focus our attention on, a fundamental contingency in all moral beliefs and attitudes. Just as our possession of certain moral beliefs is contingent, so too are the circumstances that have led us to question these beliefs, the methods we use to do so, and the standards we have accepted for a belief to count as deeply justified.

We are then faced with questions regarding the relationship between this contingency and justification in philosophy, or the nature of moral belief. Must contingency undermine justification, or can we accept some beliefs as true and justified despite this contingency, or perhaps even in virtue of certain kinds of contingent historical facts? On the other hand, might it be possible to find some beliefs or standards which relevantly avoid this kind of contingency, or which hold a kind of universal justificatory power in spite of their contingency, and so "step outside of our tradition"?[38] These are not simple questions, and they go to the heart of some long-standing and profound debates within philosophy.[39]

Though these questions may be philosophically interesting and important, they can be an unwanted diversion for any more practically-focused moral philosopher, or anyone who is primarily concerned with actually examining and criticising our dominant moral attitudes and beliefs. It must be remembered that so long as we are, for example, investigating the very possibility and limits of radical critique of our own moral beliefs, we are no longer actually *engaging in* such critique, and have taken a step away from the kind of philosophical practice which may most *immediately* bring about an understanding or improvement of our moral attitudes (which could partly explain why the historical critique is discussed so briefly by a philosopher such as Peter Singer, one more interested than most in making moral philosophy practically relevant). This threat of diversion should not be simply dismissed. The kinds of questions mentioned above have a number of features which make them particularly diverting.

For one, they are seen as foundational, such that anyone attempting to actually employ historical critique of moral attitudes must first be committed to, and so willing to defend, some position on these matters. In theory, this seems plausible. However, in practice this attitude could mean the end of practical, first-order philosophy. Of course, the answer to any question about an

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38 Brandt (1979), p. 21
39 See for example Nagel (1997) *The Last Word*, (Oxford University Press, New York) and Williams (2005), *In The Beginning Was The Deed* (Princeton University Press, Princeton), chap. 6.

immediate moral issue may be influenced by our answer to a question about the right general moral theory, which may be influenced by meta-ethical debates, which may turn on certain positions in the philosophy of language, which may depend on some particular theory of truth, and so on. Sometimes, this kind of theoretical ascent may be dialectically appropriate, but obviously it must sometimes be resisted, otherwise, as Kristie Dotson puts it, "one can lose herself/himself in the infinite regress of criticism and rival theories without ever acting in accordance with a single idea."[40]

These questions also carry a certain kind of philosophical prestige, making them harder to resist. They are seen as the kind of questions that philosophers *do* engage with, and *should* engage with, which may lead philosophers to feel *obliged* to engage with them, or to be judged negatively for putting them aside. That said, there is definitely a strong counter-current in modern philosophy, which sees more transcendental questions as esoteric or senseless, and so best ignored.

A third feature of these questions is that they are deeply intractable. They have been discussed, in some form, for hundreds of years, with no consensus emerging. This is just to say that we could not hope to quickly and *simply* answer them, to everyone's satisfaction, and then get on with our critique of moral attitudes.

Here, we may see attempts to develop a historical critique as running afoul of certain features of how philosophy is done. Graham Priest argues plausibly that "the nature of philosophy is unrestricted critique: everything is fair game for challenging and questioning."[41] He calls this the idea of 'Philosophy as Critique.' Whether or not we take this as definitional of philosophy, it is certainly true that philosophy takes itself (in a sense) to be that discipline in which everything is available for critique. On the one hand, it is this openness to critique that makes it so natural to critique society's moral attitudes from within philosophy. But on the other hand, we need to be mindful of the ways that some kinds of critique can shut down or push out others.

It may be too simple to insist, as Priest does, that "the fact that philosophy involves critique necessarily limits *philosophy* in no way whatever."[42] Though it may be true that this feature alone, or ideally practised, could not be a limitation, it may nonetheless serve to limit the activities of philosophers when combined with other features, such as those mentioned above. A certain kind of critique being seen as especially prestigious, important and fundamental will certainly act to

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40 Dotson (2012), "How is This Paper Philosophy?" in *Comparative Philosophy* 3:1, p. 23.
41 Priest (2012) "In the Same Way that This One Is: Some Comments on Dotson," in *Comparative Philosophy* 3:2, p. 6.
42 Priest (2012), p. 8, his emphasis.

limit interest in, and engagement with other kinds of critique. This will be especially true if philosophers feel obliged or bound to offer some answer to absolutely any kind of critique offered, an attitude which the practice of Philosophy as Critique must encourage.

Of course, even if this situation proves to be particularly a problem for a historical approach to critiquing moral attitudes, it's not immediately clear what our response to this problem should be. Though I see this situation as one reason to be less attracted to historical critiques, some other response may be more appropriate; for example, we may rather locate the problem in the distribution of prestige amongst philosophical projects, or we may, as Dotson suggests, aim to change the culture of philosophy, to put more value on "seeking issues and circumstances pertinent to our living."[43]

At this point it may be worth looking at how engagement with the historical origins of our moral attitudes can play out in a philosopher's work. Bernard Williams provides a good case for this task, as much of his later political work demonstrates an interest in historical engagement, along with a broader interest in the genealogy of normative attitudes and concepts.

Certainly, Williams does engage heavily with the kinds of abstract, higher-order questions I talked about above. He ultimately dismisses the possibility of our radically stepping outside of our intellectual tradition, insisting that "we cannot overcome our outlook,"[44] but he rejects the usual conservative implications of that position, the "undiscriminating acceptance of whatever conceptual resources of the society actually exist,"[45] by emphasising the strong resources for criticism that are provided by our outlook, and by a consciousness of diverse ways of living.[46] However, despite this engagement he seems aware of the danger of getting bogged down in abstract questions, as he writes "I want to emphasise the importance of thinking politically about human rights abuses, and I hope that this may... emphasise reality at the expense of philosophical abstraction."[47] Still, he seems to think that some engagement with more abstract questions "is the ineliminable consequence which follows from a philosopher's discussing the subject at all."[48]

There are a number of scattered passages in which Williams discusses the importance of taking a historical perspective on our concepts and attitudes. Most obviously, he thinks that a historical perspective is necessary for understanding the nature of our concepts. For example, he

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43 Dotson (2012), p. 24. In fact, I also argue for such a change in chapter 6.
44 Williams (2000), "Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline," in *Philosophy* 75:4, p. 494
45 Williams (2005), p. 35.
46 Williams (2005), particularly chapters 3 & 6.
47 Williams (2005), p. 64
48 Williams (2005), p. 64

writes "various conceptions or understandings of freedom, including the ones we immediately need for ourselves, involve a complex historical deposit, and we will not understand them unless we grasp something of that deposit, of what the idea of freedom, in these various connections, has become... It is the same here as it is with other values."[49] He suggests that this understanding will help "relieve puzzlement about the basis of these values and their implications."[50] This could obviously help a philosopher fend off criticism of some ethical attitude, if that criticism were based on some puzzled misunderstanding, but it's not so clear that Williams sees it as having the potential to help a philosopher mount some positive critique in the way I have been discussing.

He also sees historical awareness as necessary for resisting conservatism, or an uncritical acceptance of our pre-existing concepts, presumably by emphasising their contingency: "we have to recall that our form of life, and hence, more particularly, our ethical concepts and thoughts, have a history, and that a society such as ours is conscious of that fact."[51] This will give us "less temptation to assume that [our ethical life] is a satisfactorily functioning whole; and we shall be more likely to recognise that some widely accepted parts of it may stand condemned in the light of perfectly plausible extrapolations of other parts."[52] Here, the historical engagement seems to play a limited role; it makes space for an internal critique of our moral attitudes, but the actual work of that critique is being done not by the historical analysis itself, but by other, currently accepted moral attitudes.

When he does talk about the importance of taking a historical perspective, it is rarely in the context of generating criticism of our own moral attitudes. For example, in his essay "Human Rights and Relativism,"[53] Williams seem to be primarily concerned with two questions. The first is: given the contingency of our moral and political attitudes, can we be confident in the legitimacy of our own political order?[54] The second is: given this contingency, do we have space to critique other societies that come to our attention?[55] That is to say, here Williams seems to be interested primarily in making space to *defend* the social order he finds himself in (which he identifies as 'liberalism'), while *criticising* the social orders of others. This is most starkly indicated in the passage "the influences of the past include, now, theocratic conceptions of government and patriarchal ideas of

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49 Williams (2005), p. 75-76.
50 Williams (2000), p. 489.
51 Williams (2005), p. 36.
52 Williams (2005), p. 36-37.
53 Williams (2005), chapter 6.
54 Williams (2005), p. 67 particularly presses this question.
55 Williams (2005), p. 70.

the rights of women. Should we regard practices elsewhere that still express such conceptions as violations of fundamental human rights?"[56] At least here, he seems either to miss the possibility that our *own* practices might still express such conceptions, or to assume that we could straightforwardly identify and condemn these conceptions when they operate in our own society. Williams usually casts his own social order as something to be defended, not critiqued.

One possible exception to this appears in "Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline." Williams believes that historical explanations can show why certain moral and political outlooks make sense to us,[57] and he also briefly discusses how they can also help us understand why, in particular situations, our own outlook might *not* make sense to us. As an example, he diagnoses a difficulty with the concept of autonomy in a modern liberal outlook as resulting from its origins in "Enlightenment conceptions of the individual which do not fully make sense to us now."[58] Williams identifies three roles for this kind of understanding: it helps us explain ourselves to those not entirely committed to our outlook (perhaps including ourselves), it helps us to understand ourselves in relation to others, and it helps us get a handle on the kinds of more abstract questions I discussed in the previous section.

Though this use of history is concerned with examining our own concepts, it is still fairly weak as a form of critique. It only involves investigating a pre-existing uneasiness, rather than providing resources to challenge firmly (or unconsciously) held attitudes. In this way, historical engagement seems to be more about coming to know *why* we are being led to reject or challenge some attitude, rather than being a force which might itself lead us to make such a challenge. This is reflected in the way Williams talks about these situations. He writes that when there is a severe failure of coherence in our outlook, "there is a real question whether these ideas will survive and continue to serve us."[59] This makes it sound as though whether or not we continue to hold, or come to reject our outlook is determined by some force beyond our control, some contingent historical fact leading us one way or the other. At least, Williams doesn't explicitly suggest any role for historical critique in guiding or influencing our choice of some outlook over any alternatives. In fact, in this essay he claims that "there are no alternatives for us," that we "cannot overcome our outlook."[60]

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56 Williams (2005), p. 70.
57 See for example Williams (2005), p. 10-11.
58 Williams (2000), p. 491.
59 Williams (2000), p. 491.
60 Williams (2000), p. 494.

Prima facie, there is a problem squaring this philosophical fatalism with the anti-conservatism expressed (originally eight years earlier) in "Pluralism, Community and Left Wittgensteinianism."[61] It is tempting to interpret this as resulting from a distinction between philosophical argument and political critique; that as a matter of philosophical fact, we must acknowledge that we are radically bound by our own outlook, and can't hope to get beyond it, but also that, when it comes to political argument and critique, it would be a mistake to ever try to reason along these lines, as our even attempting to mount some kind of critique manifestly demonstrates that we do, in fact, have the resources to do so within our outlook.[62] However, this philosophical/political distinction is questionable, and doesn't fit neatly with some of Williams' expressed views, such as that "whether it is a matter of philosophical good sense to treat a certain practice as a violation of human rights, and whether it is politically good sense, cannot ultimately constitute two separate questions."[63] Of course, we should not discount the possibility that this tension simply reflects Williams having changed his mind.

When it comes to challenging or justifying the practices or governmental structure of some society, Williams focuses on two questions. The first is whether the practice makes sense as being legitimate to those governed or coerced by it.[64] A historical investigation may reveal *why* a practice does or does not make sense to someone, as we saw, but seems to play no role in answering the question of *whether* the practice makes sense to those affected. This is presumably best answered by gauging the mood and attitudes of the population, revealed through dissent and protest (or perhaps, for our own society, and on a smaller scale, introspectively).

The second question William asks is: if some practice of domination makes sense to a dominated population, to what extent can "the acceptance of these ideas... be plausibly understood as an expression of the power relations that are in question."[65] Of course, in this, Williams is moving away from what we might see as a historical approach, and towards an approach utilising the resources of critical theory, bringing us closer to what I've called the social approach. He refers to critique suggested by this question as "the critical theory test."[66] In discussing this test, Williams is again most concerned with the case of *our* liberal society finding the resources to critique some

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61 Reprinted in Williams (2000), chapter 3.
62 See Williams (2005), p. 35.
63 Williams (2005), p. 72.
64 Williams (2005), p. 71.
65 Williams (2005), p. 71.
66 Williams (2002), *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton University Press, Princeton), p. 225-232.

other society; he tellingly describes this test as "one of liberalism's most powerful weapons."[67] Williams suggests we can apply this test by *imagining* a dominated population, which holds attitudes that we are inclined to identify as serving to exploit them, going through a process of reflective criticism by which they come to see their beliefs as apparently justified by nothing other than the authority claimed by a dominant group, an authority only apparently legitimated by those very beliefs. Williams claims this process "resembles traditional critical theory in a number of respects."[68]

In Williams' discussion, neither this process, nor the process of applying this test as an external critic, seems to involve any deployment of historical awareness. Again, historical facts seem to emerge, for Williams, as something that could possibly help justify some problematic attitudes (just in case they reveal some legitimation of those attitudes which does not fail the critical theory test), but which don't play a strong role in actually critiquing the attitudes of ourselves, or others. Though Williams' version of a critical theoretic critique of a society's attitudes is rather limited, and his discussion rather brief, it is striking that, for a philosopher so closely associated with arguing for the value of a historical awareness of the genealogy of social attitudes, when it comes to actively criticising a society's ethical outlook, in ways that go beyond internal consistency, Williams seems to see a lot more power in a critical theoretic approach.

THE POWER OF THE SOCIAL APPROACH

Whether or not a historical or evolutionary approach ultimately can ground any significant, specific critiques of our current moral beliefs and attitudes, I think there are good reasons to believe that an approach employing the resources of social and critical theory will constitute a more powerful, and so in some ways more radical challenge to ordinary practice within moral philosophy. One reason is just that, as I discussed earlier, the social approach seems to demand moral engagement, rather than scepticism. This is partly because of the morally-infused discourse involved in this approach, but also because the approach raises strongly practical concerns, rather than primarily abstract theoretical issues.

To illustrate this contrast: the historical approach raises sceptical worries about our current moral beliefs and judgements on such a wide scale, and such a high level of generality, that our minds may turn to the usual array of detached moral issues favoured by philosophers, which

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67 Williams (2002), p. 220.
68 Williams (2002), p. 230.

rarely, if ever, touch our lives, such as the moral status of principles like "never kill" or "don't steal." On the other hand, the social approach focuses a philosopher's attention on real, continuing injustices or inequalities, and makes the philosopher aware of their own complicity in these situations.

The discussion of implicit bias provides a striking example of this. Implicit biases (also sometimes referred to as implicit prejudices) are well-documented, widespread, automatic, non-conscious, non-introspectively-available attitudes or processes which lead most people to systematically judge members of marginalised groups more negatively, in many respects, than members of privileged, or unmarked groups, even when they explicitly and sincerely disavow any such prejudice. The implications of widespread implicit bias for the methodology of moral philosophy are worth considering.

It is plausible that these biases will tend to illegitimately influence our moral judgements when they are directed towards individual agents who belong to marginalised groups, or towards types of act which are implicitly or explicitly associated with marginalised groups, as, for example, abortion is associated with women, and particular types of recreational drugs tend to be associated with particular social classes and racial groups. Furthermore, they seem to undermine the use of introspection to identify the reasons that we judge things as we do. Suppose we identify a particular act of self-defence as immoral, because disproportionate. If we have been partly influenced by an implicit bias against the agent, which we cannot introspectively detect, and so do not acknowledge, we must be, to some degree, wrong in attributing our judgement to a perception of disproportionality.[69] Thus, these biases can undermine not just the accuracy of our moral judgements, but also our knowledge of the reasons that we came to our judgements.

However, *in addition* to posing a problem for the methodology of moral philosophy, implicit bias also poses a particular first-order moral problem, insofar as it influences our judgements of, and attitudes towards members of marginalised groups in many everyday contexts. Strikingly, one of the more heavily discussed contexts in which implicit biases have been shown to operate is within academia, particularly in the context of teachers marking students' work.[70] This is an activity that most professional philosophers engage in frequently, many times a year, in sharp

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69 Or, perhaps, we are right to attribute our judgement to a perception of disproportionality, but our perception of disproportionality was illegitimately influenced by implicit bias.

70 Kelly & Roedder have plausibly claimed that, although no studies have explicitly investigated the connection between implicit bias and academic marking, it is reasonable to suppose such a connection would be found. I am unaware of any more recent studies investigating this. Kelly & Roedder (2008) "Racial Cognition and the Ethics of Implicit Bias", in *Philosophy Compass* 3:3, p. 534.

contrast to the more dramatic activities more commonly discussed by moral philosophers, such as those to do with killing, which most of us rarely, if ever, encounter.

I see engagement with this kind of approach as having a stronger impact on the ordinary methodology of a philosopher insofar as it can help focus their attention away from abstract and distant cases, and towards everyday cases which are not only highly relevant to the philosopher themself, but which also suggest that the philosopher may actually be frequently acting, in some way and to some degree, wrongly, and so may need to morally engage with this material in a direct, first-personal way. The responses and solutions to the first-order moral problem can also help inform the response to the methodological problems, allowing philosophers to be quite self-reflective about their methodology, without losing sight of immediate and important moral issues, and their own moral development.

Furthermore, the impact of this approach may be very different to, in particular, the historical approach. Some philosophers, such as Brandt and Singer, seem to use a historical critique of intuitions much like one might employ any negative argument in philosophy, to create an objection in order to tear down an opposing view, and then to be forgotten. Though this may be a bad idea in any case, this would be particularly strange way to employ the social approach, given the way it demands engagement with particular, pressing moral issues, and given that its reach is such that the problems it raises for standard methodology are, unless addressed head-on, likely recur for any alternate methodology developed.

Of course, this alone, that the social approach demands some kind of practical engagement, may not be too much; after all, it should hardly be radical to demand that moral philosophers actually engage in moral philosophy. However, in addition this approach may demand engagement in entirely unfamiliar ways, as it has the potential to challenge the use of two of the most familiar pillars for the improvement of moral beliefs, or at least to show them to be in need of supplementation. The first, intuition, seems to be undermined insofar as our intuitions are shown to be systematically distorted, in ways that mere acknowledgement of this distortion cannot overcome. The second, empirical research into morally relevant subjects, like economics, is effected insofar as the processes and interpretation of empirical research appears to be vulnerable to the distorting influences discussed by a social approach, such as privilege and implicit bias, and because mere awareness of these distortions does not seem to be sufficient to eliminate them (though some empirical, particularly psychological, research will doubtlessly be invaluable for

discovering exactly what will help to eliminate certain kinds of distortion).

METHODOLOGY AFTER THE SOCIAL CRITIQUE

Exactly what kind of methodology will emerge from an extended development of the social approach I have been discussing is a large question, which I will answer, in part, through the course of this thesis. However it will be worth discussing some of the more apparent methodological implications, to show how they may differ in quite significant ways from the implications of other approaches to critiquing ordinary methodology.

One fairly likely methodological implication of this kind of approach is an emphasis on the personal moral development of the philosopher, as part of the activity of philosophy.[71] Insofar as we are subject to distorting biases, oppressive assumptions, and misguiding ideologies, which get in the way of our accessing moral facts, and insofar as we see moral philosophy as that activity which aims to get us towards holding true moral beliefs, it seems natural to suppose that freeing ourselves from these influences may be part of the activity of moral philosophy. Furthermore, it is natural to see the processes of freeing ourselves from these influences as one of personal moral development.

Exactly how surprising or unorthodox this implication will seem may vary from philosopher to philosopher; in particular, some virtue ethicists may see this as obvious. However, it may be more natural to see, in the normal work of philosophers, a view whereby philosophy, done right, tells us how, why, and in what ways we (all people) need to develop ourselves morally, without this moral development actually being a part of philosophy itself. Moral development is the subject matter, or at best the result, of moral philosophy, and not necessarily part of the process. Certainly, philosophy papers rarely, if ever, contain accounts of the authors undergoing processes of moral development, or discussions of how this could be done; other, of course, than in terms of changes of explicitly held moral beliefs through philosophical argumentation.

This supposed separation between the activity of doing moral philosophy, and the processes of moral development, is sometimes reflected in the work of Eric Schwitzgebel, who has studied the relationship between an engagement in moral philosophy, and inclination towards moral behaviour. For example, he begins one paper: "One might suppose that ethicists would behave with particular moral scruple. After all, they devote their careers to studying and teaching

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71 I address this matter in much greater detail in chapter 6.

about morality. Presumably, many of them care deeply about it. And if they care deeply about it, it is not unreasonable to expect them to act on it."[72] Though Schwitzgebel is interested in the connection between moral behaviour and engaging in moral philosophy, he only supposes that there should be a connection due to the philosophers' demonstrated prior interest in morality, and increased skills of reflection. The idea that some kind of moral development, that we could expect to manifest in action, might actually be *part of* doing philosophy is not one that he mentions. The idea that immoral ethicists may necessarily be doing their job badly does not appear. Indeed, on his blog, Schwitzgebel has noted that ethicists sometimes respond to his work by claiming "my job is to *theorize* about ethics, not to live the moral life,"[73] and that he agrees with the word, if not the spirit, of this claim. If certain claims of the social critique of moral methodology are borne out, such a distinction between theorising about ethics, and being ethical (in certain ways) may not be tenable.

Of course, for this entwining of personal moral development and moral philosophy to constitute a change in the ordinary methodology of moral philosophy, it must be the case that the relevant kind of moral development must proceed through unfamiliar processes. There would be no change to the methodology of moral philosophy if we came to recognise moral development as an essential part of the activity, but saw this development as being advanced through familiar processes of theory-building, intuition-checking, and argumentation. However, it seems unlikely that this is the case. Schwitzgebel's experimental results show some evidence that studying moral philosophy seems to do little to change moral behaviour,[74] though the kinds of attitudes and behaviours he is concerned with are somewhat different to those I have been discussing. However, more generally, there seems to be some reason to believe that different processes would be called for, to change the kinds of problematic influences I have been discussing.

Focusing on the problem of implicit bias, there is good reason to suppose that merely changing and improving philosophers' explicit beliefs, the activity that moral philosophy is primarily concerned with, will not necessarily lead to much improvement in their implicit attitudes. Indeed, the academic attention towards implicit bias began when researchers noticed that, *despite* changing patterns of explicit (self-reported) prejudice, prejudicial attitudes seemed to

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72   Schwitzgebel & Rust (2009) "The Moral Behaviour of Ethicists: Peer Opinion," in *Mind* 118, p. 1044.
73   Schwitzgebel (2012) "On Whether the Job of an Ethicist Is Only to Theorize about Morality, Not to Be Moral," from *The Splintered Mind*, http://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.ca/2012/04/on-whether-job-of-ethicist-is-only-to.html.
74   Particularly in Schwitzgebel & Rust (2014) "The moral behavior of ethics professors: Relationships among self-reported behavior, expressed normative attitude, and directly observed behavior," *Philosophical Psychology* 27:3.

persist. There is some evidence to suggest that affective, rather than cognitive processes may be necessary to reduce implicit biases[75]; suffice to say, the ordinary methods of philosophy are overwhelmingly geared towards the cognitive. Furthermore, there is some evidence that people's implicit *and* explicit attitudes are unlikely to change when some kind of educational effort is imposed externally, without their possessing any strong internal motivation to be non-prejudiced.[76] This fact could limit the potential for methods of adversarial argumentation to bring about a philosopher's moral development.

How different are these implications from those of the other critiques of moral methodology? In the work of Richard Brandt, who has discussed a historical critique of intuitions, we may see an interesting parallel in the notion of "Cognitive Psychotherapy," a process meant to eliminate "desires and aversions which have something wrong with them."[77] This process (for which Brandt offers no empirical evidence of efficacy) is one of "repeatedly bring[ing] to mind, with full belief and maximal vividness, all the knowable facts that would tend either to weaken or to strengthen [a] desire or aversion..."[78] It is, perhaps, a cognitive process, but one which acknowledges the resistance of our implicit attitudes to direct cognitive control, and one which is not taken to be a usual part of moral philosophy. However, for Brandt, this process appears not in a discussion of the methodology of philosophy – not as a process that he explicitly recommends philosophers, or those who seek moral truth, should undergo – but rather as part of what it takes to be an ideal rational agent, within what is roughly an ideal observer theory of morality. That is to say, he is not directly recommending that anyone, philosopher or otherwise, undergo such a process, but rather sees this as a process that helps define the hypothetical agent whose desires are a guide to correct ethical action. Thus, it is not necessary for us, as philosophers, to undergo such a process, unless it turns out that attempting to approximate an ideal agent is actually the best way to discover moral truths.

Besides suggesting that some kind of personal moral development may be an essential component of moral philosophy, another fairly natural implication of a social critique of methodology is the possibility that philosophers will need to change the kinds of material that they

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75 Rudman, Ashmore & Gary (2001), "'Unlearning' Automatic Biases: The Malleability of Implicit Prejudice and Stereotypes", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81:5, p. 866
76 Rudman et al (2001), p. 857-858, and Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones & Vance (2002), "The Regulation of Implicit and Explicit Race Bias: The Role of Motivations to Respond Without Prejudice," in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82: 5.
77 Brandt (1972), "Rationality, Egoism, and Morality," in *Journal of Philosophy* 69:20, p. 682.
78 Brandt (1972), p. 683.

take to be evidence or data for moral philosophy, or perhaps rather the way they come to find and gather that material. In particular, consistent with some threads in feminist and anti-racist theory, there may be call for an increased emphasis on listening, to first-personal accounts of experiences of injustice and moral harm, as a way to come to understand those injustices and harms. As a critique casts doubt on the ability of techniques such as introspection and intuition to avoid being distorted by bias and limited by a philosopher's particular social privileges, new methods for understanding and even identifying moral harms will be called for. It seems fitting that an emphasis on listening to personal accounts of harm and injustice could fill this need, and help us see harms that might not be apparent from mere statistical analysis, given problematic background assumptions, and that will not occur to individual philosophers, due to their lack of relevant life experiences. Richard Delgado has written that "stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset – the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place."[79] This seems to apply just as well to moral discourse.

To some extent, this kind of method is not entirely unfamiliar in philosophy, as the use of narrative, particularly fictional narrative, is common, and implicated in the use of thought experiments. However, the way narrative is currently often used may need to be reconsidered. The use of the kinds of sketchy fictional narratives that often appear in thought experiments seems particularly problematic, as, far from revealing the particular moral harms experienced by individuals, these usually merely invite philosophers to bring their own assumptions, inclinations and preconceptions to a case, inviting all the problems of implicit bias and ideology.[80] This approach is antithetical to the idea of really listening to an unfamiliar perspective or narrative.

Something closer may be seen in the occasional use of narratives sourced from literature, or the general culture. A striking example is provided by the widespread use of a story from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in moral philosophy.[81] This story has been particularly used to inquire into the nature of akrasia, and examine how our moral beliefs and moral emotions may come apart. Though interesting, it is notable that these can be fairly abstract, theoretical moral issues, of more concern to a relatively detached agent considering how to act, like Huck Finn, rather than a person immediately facing, and *needing* to deal with, injustice, like his companion,

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79 Delgado (1989), "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative," in *Michigan Law Review* 87:8, p. 2413.
80 I discuss thought experiments in more detail at the end of chapter 5.
81 Originating with Bennett (1974) "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn", in *Philosophy* 49:188.

Jim. One might wonder how different the concerns of moral philosophy might be, or might have to be, were any particular slave narrative, or modern account of institutional prejudice, to enjoy a prominence within philosophy comparable to the Huckleberry Finn narrative.

I have argued for the value of an approach to philosophical methodology which departs radically from methodologically conservative, intuition-based methodologies, by taking seriously the influence of oppressive social forces on our pre-theoretical moral attitudes. Through most of the rest of this thesis, my attention is more directly focused on exploring themes and insights from critical social theories in order to develop specific methodological critiques and recommendations for moral philosophers. However, first I will address a particular objection one may raise against the force and relevance of the social approach to genealogical critique, one I call the scope challenge.

Presented with the three different geneological critiques of moral methodology in the previous chapter, one may suspect that the implications of the social approach will be not be particularly significant, especially as compared to the other two approaches, due to the social approach having a kind of limited scope. The historical approach and the evolutionary approach both intend to implicate our entire set of pre-theoretical moral intuitions in error, by claiming that intuitions, per se, derive from these questionable sources. On the other hand, we can only plausibly maintain that the kinds of errors highlighted by the social approach are at work when the moral issue under consideration has some kind of link to systematic oppression in society. So, one may object, while the social approach has a lot to say about moral issues regarding, for example, gender relations, our discussion of many other cases of concern to moral philosophers – indeed, some of the most central, and frequently discussed cases, such as lying and promise keeping – will be untouched by this critique. In this chapter, I want to discuss three ways that we might challenge, and severely mitigate the strength of this objection.

EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF THE SOCIAL APPROACH

To explore the first way of mitigating the strength of the scope challenge to a social theoretic critique of moral philosophy, we must carefully examine the kinds of issues and cases that are of most interest to moral philosophers; in doing so, we will probably discover that the kinds of issues which involve issues of social justice and oppression come up a lot more than we might expect. As Kristin Waters has put it, "In philosophy, common topics that are often assumed not to be raced or gendered may reveal themselves to be so under closer scrutiny."[1]

Let's start with an obvious case. The moral permissibility of abortion and infanticide has been a major issue in philosophical ethics over the past half century, of interest both to those engaged in practical ethics, given its prominent political profile, particularly in the United States of America, and to more theoretical ethical philosophers, as it sheds light on moral issues regarding

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1 Waters (2014), "Past as Prologue: Intersectional Analysis from the Nineteenth Century to the Twenty-First," in Goswami, O'Donovan & Yount (2014), p.33. Note, in this statement her attention is not restricted to moral philosophy.

life and death, the nature of harm, the nature of personhood, and the scope of personal autonomy.[2] Abortion is an obvious case because those employing an explicitly feminist approach enjoy a fairly major presence within discussions of the moral permissibility of abortion, both in academic philosophy and in society at large. This is partly because the moral dimensions of abortion, and restrictions upon abortion, can only be fully understood with some awareness of traditionally feminist concerns, most obviously the patriarchy's historical and continuing interest in ownership and control of women bodies, and women's reproductive choices.

However, though the connection between the ethics of abortion and feminism is fairly obvious, further investigation of the issue reveals the relevance of other kinds of social and critical theory. For example, studies have indicated that a large number of abortions are sought for financial reasons, and that those denied access to abortion are significantly more likely to become unemployed, or move below the poverty line.[3] These findings indicate a prima facie case that some critical class-based analysis of abortion could be relevant to our analysis of its moral permissibility. Indeed, due to the systematic and intersectional nature of oppression, this kind of spreading of critical relevance will be common.

Widening our attention out from the case of abortion, most of the issues that are prominent within the philosophical field of practical ethics will tend to have some connection to topics of interest to social justice theories. To briefly go through some examples: Euthanasia will relate to issues of ageism (marginalisation of the basis of age), ableism (marginalisation on the basis of ability or health) and mental health. Discussion of overseas aid will relate to issues of classism, capitalism and racism. Discussion of the genetic modification of crops will also relate to issues of classism and racism (as these programs are often directed by large corporations in non-western countries, and touted as making food cheaper, and so more available for the poor). Discussion of transhumanism, or genetic modification of people, will run up against issues of classism (through the issue of accessibility) and ableism (which influences our understanding of the conditions looking to be eliminated). Reproductive ethics will generally be bound up with issues of gender, while medical ethics and bioethics will often be bound up with issues of ableism. The relevance of social theoretic approaches to animal and environmental ethics is not so apparent, as the treatment

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2   A very small selection of the vast amount of philosophical work on Abortion includes:
     Thomson, (1971) "A Defence Of Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1.
     Marquis, (1989) "Why Abortion is Immoral," *Journal of Philosophy* 86.
     Tooley, (1972) "Abortion and Infanticide," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2.
3   e.g. The Turnaway Study, discussed at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/16/magazine/study-women-denied-abortions.html and http://www.ansirh.org/research/turnaway.php.

of animals has not traditionally been a concern of these kinds of theories, but it is interesting that one of the most influential philosophers in the field of animal ethics, Peter Singer, has explicitly argued that our views on animal ethics are influenced by a "speciesism," directly analogous to the racism and sexism that have been among the most prominent concerns of some kinds of critical theory.[4] Discussion of the death penalty (and criminal justice more generally) will run up against issues of class and race, given how the poor and the racially marginalised are massively over-represented in the criminal justice system.

It may be illustrative to go into this last point in more detail. Criminal justice and punishment form important topics in moral and political philosophy, both practical and theoretical. Even when not explicitly discussed, we can suppose these considerations help form the background of discussions around moral wrongs that also are, or could be crimes, such as murder and theft. Punishment, in one form or another, also appears in many examples and thought experiments within moral philosophy, such as in the *Magistrate and the Mob* case, often employed in arguments for or against Utilitarianism, where a magistrate must decide whether to frame and convict an innocent man in order to prevent a dangerous riot.[5] Issues of punishment are also of major moral concern outside of philosophy, particularly in the American context where civil rights activists are fighting the mass incarceration of the black population, and pushing for fundamental changes to the criminal justice system, such as prison abolition.

The relevance of racial issues to discussions of criminal justice and punishment are deep, and cannot be simply stipulated aside. Toni Morrison has said that "Blackness and criminality are merged in the minds of most white Americans."[6] That includes many philosophers. A study by Eberhardt, et al has suggested that the mental association between blackness and criminality is bidirectional, i.e. it is not just that "The mere presence of a Black man... can trigger thoughts that he is violent and criminal," but also that "thinking of crime can trigger thoughts of Black people."[7] In the context of these psychological realities, we cannot assume that it is possible to simply not think about race while thinking about crime and punishment. Nonetheless, that is how much philosophy of punishment attempts to proceed; remarkably, the Stanford Encyclopedia of

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4 Singer, (1993) *Practical Ethics*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge), p. 55-61.
5 See Nielsen (1972), p. 223.
6 This quote appears in an interview that can be found at TheAntiIntellect (2012), "Toni Morrison Calls Out The Racist Association of Blackness with Criminality," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvcJ1YyQCkA, accessed 20th May 2015.
7 Eberhardt, et al. (2004), "Seeing Black: Race, Crime, and Visual Processing," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, p. 876.

Philosophy articles on Punishment, Legal Punishment, Retributive Justice, and Theories of Criminal Law all contain no mention of race.[8] Similarly, cases like *the Magistrate and the Mob* are presented with only an oblique reference to "a much smaller and quite vulnerable section of the community,"[9] despite the obviousness of the cases' situation within a context and history of mass incarceration of black populations, and violent, racist vigilante actions used to terrorise black communities.[10] Punishment is a *highly* racially loaded topic in moral and political philosophy, but is rarely treated as such.

We should now widen our attention again, to those moral issues which are of less interest to practical ethics, but which often crop up as examples and cases studies in more theoretical works of ethics. It is not always clear what *exactly* marks this distinction, but I see it as roughly that when specific moral acts are discussed in the context of more theoretical ethics, the larger discussion is rarely about those particular acts, but rather about some more general issues of morality. For example, when Peter Geach talks about murder in his article "Murder and Sodomy," he is primarily concerned with the possibility of deriving a moral conclusion from non-moral premises.[11] Similarly, discussions of the morality of breaking promises are often raised in service of arguments for or against Utilitarianism.[12]

Again we can see the relevance of social justice concerns to these issues. To focus on just one example, one of the most common acts used in such abstract contexts is murder. To name a few cases, murder forms the basis of thought experiments about Utilitarianism and integrity, in the Jim & The Indians case[13], about the distinction between acts and omissions, in the Smith & Jones case[14], and about the doctrine of double effect, in many trolley cases.[15] This common use can probably be explained by murder's potential simplicity (as simple as agent A shoots and kills victim B), flexibility (the circumstances - such as the intentions, actors, methods, and consequences – can be manipulated in a way that would be difficult with some other acts, such as tax evasion), and relative lack of controversy (almost everyone agrees that acts of murder tend to be prima facie

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8   See Zalta ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/
9   Nielsen (1972), p. 223.
10   This situation is particularly obvious in, but not unique to, the United States: in Australia, the incarceration rates for Aboriginal people are comparable to those of African Americans in the U.S., and the racial disparity is actually *significantly* greater. See Korff (2015), "Aboriginal Prison Rates," on *Creative Spirits*, http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/law/aboriginal-prison-rates, accessed 20th May 2015.
11   Geach, (1976) "Murder and Sodomy," in *Philosophy* 51.
12   For example, in Narveson, (1963) "The Desert-Island Problem," in *Analysis* 23:3.
13   Williams (1973), 'A Critique of Utilitarianism' in Smart & Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.)
14   Rachels (1975), 'Active and Passive Euthanasia' *New England Journal of Medicine*, 292.
15   Foot (1967), "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect," *Oxford Review* 5.

immoral). For better or worse, they are also some of the most obviously dramatic acts there are.

Acts of murder, fictional and real, are ubiquitous in modern media. The most highly publicised acts of murder are mass shootings, which tend to receive wide, detailed coverage. One of the immediate public reactions to such events tends to be to label the perpetrator as 'crazy,' or 'psychotic,' usually on the basis of nothing other than the act they committed. The implication seems to be that we simply cannot fathom how anyone could commit such a terrible act without being psychologically completely unlike 'us,' the mentally healthy, that "anyone who murders *en masse* and then commits suicide must be insane."[16] In this way, our attitudes towards these kinds of crimes are completely bound up in our attitudes towards mental health, an area where stigmatising and marginalising attitudes are rife. Particularly in the U.S., mass shootings often spark call for investment in mental health services, even when the perpetrator has shown no signs of poor mental health other than in the act of murder itself. In fact, "there has not been a strong, consistent link between mass murder and mental illness," and "it is rare for [mass murderers] to present with psychosis."[17]

The context of more common-place acts of murder also makes space for analysis in terms of the resources of social theory. Murder overwhelmingly occurs in two particular contexts, the context of wider criminal activity, and the context of intimate relationships; between partners, or within families.[18] The frequency of murder, particularly in a criminal context, is strongly correlated with low levels of political and economic development, and high levels of income inequality,[19] which clearly suggests some role for a class-based understanding of many acts of murder. On the other hand, in regions where economic development is stronger, a greater proportion of murders take place in domestic or intimate contexts. The victims of these murders are overwhelmingly women.[20] This kind of murder is "both an extreme manifestation of gender inequality and discrimination, and a deadly tool used to maintain women's subordinate status."[21] It has been argued that this kind of crime can be reduced through "higher levels of female education... and financial independence of women."[22] From this, the relevance of feminist analysis to our

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16 Lee, et al (2007), "Reflections on a Mass Homicide," *Annals of the Academy of Medicine* 36:6, p. 444-447.
17 Aitken, Oosthuizen, Emsley & Seedat (2008), "Mass Murders: Implications for Health Professionals," *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine* 38: 3, p. 264.
18 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2011), "2011 Global Study on Homicide," p. 10
19 UNODC (2011), p. 29-37
20 UNODC (2011), p. 11.
21 UN Women (2011), "Progress of the World's Women 2011-2012: In Pursuit of Justice," quoted in UNODC (2011), p. 57.
22 UNODC (2011), p. 61.

understanding of real-life acts of murder should be obvious.

We can now move away from consideration of the actual context of murder, and instead to philosophical attitudes regarding factors which may influence our moral judgements about acts of murder. Philosophers and people at large will discuss the morality of acts of murder, qualifying them as self-defence, provoked, permissible killings in just war, foreseen but unintended consequences (as in Trolley cases), collateral damage (as in civilian causalities in war), etc. While the judgement that "murder is wrong" is usually held fast, and taken to be common ground, differences of judgement will be apparent in drawing distinctions between "murder" and (mere) "killing," and in assessing exactly how wrong some particular acts of killing may be, given certain kinds of purported mitigation. These attitudes are also reflected in the law. In our understanding of these distinctions, social justice concerns will often be very relevant.

For example, within philosophy, law, and common moral opinion, self-defence is thought to eliminate the blameworthiness of what would otherwise be considered murder. To count as acting in self-defence, a perpetrator must assess their situation to be one of immediate danger. However, this kind of assessment, whether made first-person and in the moment, or later by a jury, will obviously be prone to distortion by stereotypes, particularly racial stereotypes.[23] These problems were recently brought to international attention by the killing of an unarmed black teenager, Trayvon Martin, in the United States, for which the perpetrator claimed self-defence, and by the more recent Black Lives Matter movement.

Though less explicitly called upon in philosophical contexts, provocation has a similar problem; it is based on the idea that a person may lose control upon being confronted by some offensive behaviour, but what kinds of events can make a person lose control, and what kind of events we accept as sufficiently offensive in the relevant way, will be highly influenced by problematic social attitudes. In fact, examination of the legal use of provocation seems to reveal the concept as primarily functioning to legitimate certain forms of gender-based male violence.[24] Gorman has argued that, in the context of Canadian law, provocation's "primary purpose appears to be to reward men who are so possessive of their spouses that they are willing to kill in order to

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23 The effects of race in determinations of self-defence, in a legal context, is explored in Armour (1994), "Race *Ipsa Loquitur*: Of Reasonable Racists, Intelligent Bayesians, and Involuntary Negrophobes," *Stanford Law Review* 46:4, reprinted in Delgado and Stefancic (2000) "Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge, Second Edition," (Temple University Press: Philadelphia), p.180-193. Also Lee (1996), "Race and Self-Defence: Towards a Normative Conception of Reasonableness," *Minnesota Law Review* 367, reprinted in Delgado and Stefancic (2000), p. 204-210. Much in these discussions will be as relevant to philosophy and morality as to law.

24 See Fitz-Gibbon (2012) "Provocation in New South Wales: The Need for Abolition," in *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 45, p. 210.

ensure their spouse does not leave them for another man."[25]

Provocation is also the basis of 'gay-panic' and 'trans-panic' defences against murder, where male defendants claim that they panicked, and killed a gay man who was making a sexual advance on them, or killed a trans woman upon realising that she was transgender.[26] These defences, which follow the above pattern of provocation invoked to defend the use of violence to protect perceived male sexual interests, are "also troubling because they seek to capitalise on an unconscious bias in favour of heterosexuality" and gender normativity.[27] Note this crucial point: these problems with self-defence and provocation, though most obvious in a legal context, are not merely legal problems. These legal realities can *only* exist by reflecting and exploiting systemic cultural biases and attitudes which allow people to believe that murder may be less serious when, for example, committed against a gay man, or against a woman exercising sexual agency. Furthermore, prima facie, there is no particular reason to believe that philosophers will be immune to these biases. I believe these kinds of concerns could be uncovered through a detailed examination of many, though plausibly not all, of the kinds of cases employed in theoretical discussions of ethics.

One might object that even though real world judgements about moral acts such as murder tend to be shaped by problematic cultural biases, this needn't be a problem for moral philosophers employing thought experiments to discuss theoretical issues, as we can carefully craft our examples such that the particular features which trigger these biases are avoided. However, there are problems with this approach.

Firstly, there is a problem regarding how this could be done. Suppose, in crafting a thought experiment involving murder, we are worried that murders in which the victim is white seem to be treated more seriously than murders in which the victim is a person of colour,[28] and we want to avoid triggering implicit biases which might influence readers' judgement of our case. Explicitly describing the victim as a person of colour may trigger racist biases tending to soften readers'

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25 Gorman (1999), "Provocation: The Jealous Husband Defence," in *Criminal Law Quarterly* 42, p. 479.
26 Lee (2008), "The Gay Panic Defence," in *U.C. Davis Law Review* 42, p. 471 & 513. Note the murder rate for trans women, particularly trans women of colour, is staggering. Something like a trans panic defense was attempted by the murderer of trans woman Jennifer Laude in the Philippines. The murderer's testimony reveals how the idea of provocation can be bound up with patriarchal notions of honour, and transmisogynistic ideas of gender. See Whaley (2015), "U.S. Marine Testifies in Killing of Transgender Woman in Philippines," *New York Times*, August 24, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/25/world/asia/us-marine-joseph-scott-pemberton-testifies-in-transgender-killing-in-philippines.html. He has since been convicted of homocide – a less serious charge than murder – and Ms. Laude's gender was considered a mitigating circumstance.
27 Lee (2008), p. 471.
28 As may be indicated by the finding that, in the United States, "those who murdered whites were found to be more likely to be sentenced to death than those who murdered blacks," reported in United States General Accounting Office (1990), "Death Penalty Sentencing: Research Indicates Pattern of Racial Disparities," p. 5

moral judgement. On the other hand, explicitly describing the victim as white may lead readers' to inflate the severity of their judgement; we can't simply assume that prejudiced judgements made regarding marginalised groups are problematic deviations from an otherwise perfectly unproblematic norm.

The obvious solution, and the de facto standard practice, is to simply leave any mention of race out of the case altogether; after all, if it's irrelevant to the philosophical problem, why mention it? Instead, the thought is, we should abstract away from any particularities which will bias our judgement one way or the other. However, this approach may still be problematic.

There is a problem regarding whether it is even possible. Some social identities are privileged in such a way that they become assumed as default. For example, in actual, fictional, and theoretical cases, people will tend to assume an individual is heterosexual, unless there is some reason given to believe otherwise. Thus any attempt to be neutral between possible sexualities of a character in some example by simply not mentioning any will be bound to fail; readers will simply assume, and judge as though, the character is heterosexual. A similar thing seems to happen with default assumptions of whiteness.[29]

However, even if possible, such an approach may not be desirable. By abstracting away from these details, we abstract away from much of the context which may be relevant to any full understanding of the acts involved (as indicated, in the case of murder, by the relevance of a class-based and gender-based understanding, evidenced by a statistical analysis of the context of real-life murder cases). It seems implausible that such abstraction could bring us to better understand these cases.[30] Furthermore, as we have seen, the mental associations between concepts like crime and blackness are liable to be triggered without any explicit mention; in abstracting away from these details we would leave problematic factors which influence our judgement in play, while also failing to bring our attention to factors which may prompt a more critical response. For example, abstracting away from the gender of agents in a case about domestic violence may leave in play patriarchal attitudes which allow people to see domestic violence as less serious than other forms of violence, or a purely private matter, while also failing to draw attention to the systematic gender

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29 Relatedly, and more generally, Thomas Ross, writing in a legal context, discusses how describing a case abstractly may invite an audience to fill in details in way that introduces problematic elements from their cultural influences. Ross (1989), "The Richmond Narratives," in *Texas Law Revue* 68, reprinted in Delgado and Stefancic (2000), p. 42-51.

30 Mills (2005), "'Ideal Theory' as Ideology," *Hypatia* 20:3, discusses the plausibility of using idealisation, and abstracting away from particularities of gender and race, in order to advance our understanding of actual ethical cases. See particularly p. 168-169, 173. I will discuss this much more in chapter 4.

inequality which lies at the heart of the vast majority of domestic violence, and enables those problematic attitudes. I will be discussing the use of abstraction in moral theory in more detail in the following chapter.

At this point, one could argue that, as these theoretical discussions aren't *really* about the morality of the act featured in their thought experiments, but rather about some more theoretical moral concern, none of the complications raised by social justice concerns could be relevant to their use. In some cases, this claim is clearly implausible. If a conclusion that there is something wrong with Utilitarianism is only reached via the view that Utilitarianism cannot account for the immorality of promise breaking, then anything that could cast doubt on the judgement that promise breaking is wrong must cast doubt on whether that conclusion has been established. In other cases, the claim is much more plausible. In "Murder and Sodomy," Geach employs the concept of murder in his examples, but he is only concerned with whether certain forms of logical argument are *valid*. As such, one could even fully agree with everything Geach says while actually denying that murder is immoral. At no point does Geach's paper rely, explicitly or implicitly, on the judgement, whether intuitional or otherwise, that murder is wrong.

Of course, there are also some less clear cases. For example, take James William Forrester's paper "Gentle Murder, or The Adverbial Samaritan."[31] In this paper, Forrester aims to construct a paradox, to prove that there is some problem with standard deontic logic. As such it is, like the Geach paper, at a fairly abstract level. However, after setting up the paradox, in order to reach a conclusion as to how to fix deontic logic, Forrester makes the claim that "A deontic system from which we can derive that Smith has a legal obligation to murder Jones is not the sort of system we are likely to want to adopt."[32] Though couched in qualifying language, clearly this is a specific moral claim about the morality of murder, and trades on our judgement (intuitional or otherwise) that murder is wrong.

The hope may be that, because Forrester's argument is not really about murder, but rather about deontic logic, the details could always be adapted to make the case work. Murder just happened to be part of the case that Forrester used, but it could be replaced by some other act about which no relevant concerns could be raised; perhaps even by some purely schematic idea of "an immoral act." I think we have reason to be wary of being too quick to assume that such adjustments can be made, without checking whether they really can, and without checking how

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31 Forrester, (1984) "Gentle Murder, or The Adverbial Samaritan," in *The Journal Of Philosophy* 81:4.
32 Forrester (1984), p. 197.

much the persuasive power of our arguments rests on the intuitive judgements as they stand.[33] Nonetheless, this may be possible for some arguments.

Two Other Responses to the Scope Challenge

We have seen how the scope of social justice concerns may cover many kinds of moral issues that we might otherwise not immediately suspect to be bound up in issues of systematic oppression and marginalisation. Nonetheless, it is plausible that some other moral concerns will ultimately remain outside the immediate reach of this kind of critique. Still, there are two other responses to be made, which may challenge the methodology of moral philosophers even when they deal with those particular moral issues.

The first response is just to note that, in the practical domain, moral issues inevitably must be weighed against each other, and when the kinds of problems revealed by social justice theories lead us to systematically over- or underestimate the moral significance of some issue, this will influence our judgement in those instances when this issue must be weighed against any other issue.

For example, the debate about the morality of pornography is sometimes framed as involving a weighing of women's right to equality, or freedom from sexual violence, against a more general right to freedom of speech.[34] Thus, even if (implausibly) our understanding of free speech *were* generally outside the scope of a social justice critique, any full understanding of the limits and importance of free speech would inevitably be impacted by social justice concerns, as issues of free speech ran up against other moral concerns. So, when Ronald Dworkin claims that any moral case for restricting pornography must rest on the "frightening principle that considerations of equality require that some people not be free to express their tastes or convictions or preferences anywhere,"[35] a feminist could reply that to see this principle as frightening, rather than compelling, must rest on an overestimation of the value of free expression, enabled by an underestimation of the disvalue of the violence, degradation and oppression that constitutes inequality. [36]

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33 Consider Hewitt's suggestions that if we fill in details about the Experience Machine thought experiment, rather than simply *assuming* that they *can* be filled in, we may see our intuitions change. Hewitt (2010) "What do our intuitions about the experience machine really tell us about hedonism?" in *Philosophical Studies* 151:3.

34 See for example MacKinnon (1987) "Not a Moral Issue" in in *Feminism Unmodified*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA),

35 Dworkin (1993) "Women and Pornography,"in *The New York Review of Books*, Oct. 21, 1993.

36 That said, there is also an important line of argument that attempts to more directly includes freedom of speech under the scope of feminist theory, and argues that pornography actually violates women's freedom of speech by silencing them. See for example West (2003), "The Free Speech Argument Against Pornography," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 33:3.

More generally, in a world where moral agents have limited resources, such as attention, and funds for social programs, our response to most moral problems, especially in non-emergency situations, must be bound by how important that particular problem is in relation to others which demand our resources.

The second response is to point out that the boundaries of what is considered philosophically interesting should not be immune to critical scrutiny. Of course, not all moral issues are considered equally by philosophers, nor considered in proportion to their severity. In the words of Lucius T. Outlaw (Jr.), "Concerns for the right to life of anti-abortionists are much more likely to be explored in ethics courses in [philosophy] departments than the right to life denied of the Peoples inhabiting this continent [North America] when the explorers and settler-colonists from Europe arrived, or the right to freedom and full citizenship denied to Africans and their descendants for more than three centuries."[37]

The scope challenge works by claiming that many cases of concern to moral philosophers, and perhaps in particular the central cases, are not the kinds of cases that will be influenced by the concerns of social justice theories. Thus, the methodological implications of such theories are limited, to just those cases where these concerns can be shown to be relevant. But, of course, philosophers' choices to look at particular cases rather than others is, itself, a methodological issue. As Lisa H. Schwartzman puts it, "One's culture and perspective can shape the questions that are defined as philosophically important and the assumptions that are taken as 'obvious' by the theorist. Because philosophers are overwhelmingly white, predominantly male, and generally come from the upper-middle class, their work may reflect the interests and concerns of a small, particularly privileged, subset of the population."[38]

The processes by which particular issues and concerns come to be regarded as philosophically important are obviously going to be rather complex, more complicated than people simply writing about the issues that are most salient and concerning to them. There will be a great deal of influence from the history of philosophy, as those topics that have already been established as canonically philosophically important continue to hold the profession's attention. There will be influence from society at large, as those moral issues that gain widespread societal attention come to be discussed in philosophy. Similarly, cultural influences will play a role, as

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37 Outlaw (2014) "Social Ordering and the Systematic Production of Ignorance," p. 208, in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, eds. Sullivan & Tuana (2014) (State University of New York Press: Albany)
38 Schwartzman (2012), p. 307-308

philosophers discuss the kinds of cases and moral issues that come up in influential literature, or pop culture. Some issues may be rendered invisible through processes such as cultural silencing (for example, the failure or inability to discuss sexual harassment before the 1960s[39]), or normalisation (what is seen as a normal/natural part of life may not be salient as something in need of examination, for example, childhood bullying). Some issues may be consciously dismissed as too specific a concern, or not a sufficiently universal experience to count as philosophically relevant.[40]

These processes will tend to be self-perpetuating; what is seen as philosophically interesting gets discussed in philosophical papers, establishing itself as a topic of interest for philosophy, and so gathering more philosophical attention, and papers.[41] Similarly, philosophical focus on the issues that are most salient and relevant to a privileged subset of the population will establish an image, and reality, of philosophy not being relevant to those outside this subset[42], which will inevitably work to perpetuate the current demographics and focus of academic philosophy.

A social approach will be relevant to understanding and critiquing many of these processes by which topics come to be seen as philosophically interesting, philosophically relevant, and philosophically central. However, it is worth noting that these processes will often, but not always work in the direction of pushing the kinds of moral cases to which social justice concerns are most relevant out of philosophy, and pulling those cases to which these concerns are not relevant in. To illustrate, consider these two cases:

First, take the case of street harassment. Street harassment is roughly "any action or comment between strangers in public places that is disrespectful, unwelcome, threatening and/or harassing," and directed towards socially vulnerable individuals.[43] Most paradigmatically, street harassment is directed towards women, and "ranges from leers, whistles, honks, kissing noises, and non-sexually explicit evaluative comments, to more insulting and threatening behaviour like vulgar gestures, sexually charged comments, flashing, and stalking, to illegal actions like public

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39 Fricker (2007), p. 149-155.
40 Kristie Dotson discusses this kind of problem in terms of norms by which philosophical work is called to justify itself as counting as philosophy, in Dotson (2012).
41 cf. Dotson (2012) p. 7-8.
42 Dotson discusses the perception and reality of academic philosophy's relevance to black women, and other diverse peoples, at the start of Dotson (2012).
43 Definition from http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/about/what-is-street-harassment/ (2013). Their definition is limited to harassment "motivated by gender," but this seems unnecessarily restricted, and elides the role of other factors, such as race, sexuality, and perceptions of disability, in street harassment.

masturbation, sexual touching, assault, and murder."[44] It serves to intimidate and terrorise its victims, establish them as subject to control by dominant groups, and establish the public space as not safe for, or not belonging to, these people. It also serves to modify potential victims' behaviour towards social norms, such as towards heteronormativity and cisnormativity, in the case of queer victims of harassment.

Street harassment is a clearly moral issue that has a large, persistent impact on a huge number of people;[45] significantly wider impact than popular philosophical topics such as murder, euthanasia, and promise keeping. It would also raise extremely interesting theoretical issues. For example, there are issues concerning the role of motivation in immoral action and moral judgement, as street harassment often seems to be conceptualised by its perpetrators as complementary or trivial. There are issues concerning our understanding of cumulative actions, as the negative impact of harassment derives particularly from repeated and ubiquitous action, such that any hypothetical, isolated, one-off incident would be much less significant, and qualitatively different. It also provides an interesting case study for moral education and culture, as the prevalence and form of street harassment seems to vary wildly between societies. Despite all this, it has received extremely little philosophical attention.[46] It is easy to attribute this lack of attention to the factors discussed above, particularly the lack of immediate relevance and salience of this issue to the predominantly white, male, cisgender demographic of professional philosophy, and the normalisation of street harassment in our society obscuring its moral importance.

Secondly, take the case of abortion, a topic to which critical concerns are centrally relevant, but which *has* received a great deal of philosophical attention. Exactly why abortion has gathered so much attention within academic philosophy is a complex subject. On the face of it, it is not a subject which is *directly* relevant to the majority of practising philosophers, who, as cisgender men, will never face the possibility of personally having an abortion. Naturally there will be some influence on topics of interest to philosophers from the wider culture - the abortion debate is prominent outside of philosophy, especially in the United States – but this cannot be the whole story, as other moral debates gathering widespread public attention, such as that over

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44 http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/about/what-is-street-harassment/ (2013)
45 One large Canadian study revealed harassment from strangers to have been experienced by more than 80% of Canadian women, and showed this harassment to have a significant impact on women's feeling of safety in public spaces. MacMillan, Nierobisz, & Welsh (2000), "Experiencing the Streets: Harassment and Perceptions of Safety Among Women," in *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 37:3, p. 306-322. Other studies are listed at http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/resources/statistics/statistics-academic-studies/ (2013).
46 One exception is Crouch (2009), "Sexual Harassment in Public Places" in *Social Philosophy Today* 25.

homosexuality and gay rights, do not enjoy such a level of prominence in academic philosophy. Part of the story probably involves the connections between philosophical debates about abortion and more general topics of moral interest, such as autonomy, personhood, and the role of religious assumptions in public moral debate. But again, we saw similar connections to topics of general interest as potentially arising in the study of street harassment, which is not so widely discussed.

An important question to ask, which emphasises the role of social justice concerns in abortion's coming to be a topic of interest in moral philosophy, is why abortion should be considered a moral issue at all. Why should it not be considered a moral non-issue, like blood transfusions generally are, or considered so obviously permissible as to be not worth discussing, as alcohol consumption generally is, within philosophical circles?[47] A strong feminist answer to this question, that "the commitment of the political right wing to opposing abortion [is] part of a general strategy to reassert patriarchal control over women in the face of significant feminist influence,"[48] and that this commitment, advanced through moral language, will resonate within philosophy, is at least plausible.

So, while these processes will not always work to push topics that fall under the scope of a social approach out of philosophy, nonetheless this response shows that, even if social justice concerns may not be relevant to our responses to some particular moral issue, we may always be subject to more general methodological concerns about why we are talking about these issues and not others; about whether we are going about the activity of moral philosophy in a methodologically and morally good way. Thus, given the sometimes hidden relevance of social injustice and oppression to many prominent topics within mainstream moral philosophy, and to moral philosophers' choice of what topics to highlight and discuss, these concerns cannot be legitimately ignored by any moral philosophers, and must inform our methodologies.

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47 Susan Sherwin critiques the entire state of the abortion debate within philosophy, pointing out anti-feminist tendencies in both anti-abortion and pro-choice articles. She argues that a truly feminist approach to abortion must not treat abortion as an abstract moral issue, and must insist on examining abortion in the light of the actual context of women's lives, and broader feminist concerns. Sherwin (1991), "Abortion Through A Feminist Ethics Lens" in *Dialogue* 30:3. I return to this in chapter 5.
48 Sherwin (1991), p. 330.

CHAPTER 4 - ABSTRACTION AND IDEALISATION

There is an ongoing methodological debate in feminist ethics regarding the role of abstract theorising in ethical reasoning; we have already seen in the previous chapter how abstraction is sometimes used as a sort of defence against the need to deal with the kinds of detailed moral issues of interest to feminist philosophers. Critiques of abstraction have come from a number of traditions of philosophy, including from particularist ethicists and communitarian philosophers, but it is those critiques that arise particularly from feminist approaches, and related approaches, such as those from critical race theory, that interest me in this chapter. These critiques tend to focus on the idea that in attempting to form certain kinds of abstract moral theory, philosophers often abstract away from details of substantial ethical importance, particularly regarding oppression and ideology, and that by doing so they end up with theories that fail to satisfactorily deal with these problems, that render injustices invisible, and that systematically privilege the interests of members of dominant groups.

In this chapter, I intend to examine arguments for and against certain kinds of abstraction in ethics, and to stake out a methodological position. I will start by introducing the feminist arguments against abstraction, and then examining Onora O'Neill's response, which suggests that the problem is not with abstraction per se, but rather with a kind of idealisation. I will then discuss the way that Charles Mills expands on this idea of idealisation in ways that go quite beyond O'Neill's point, and that seem to again cast doubt on the value of much abstraction. I will next look at Lisa Schwartzman's criticism of O'Neill, which defends the use of ideals in ethics, and argues against O'Neill's use of abstraction. Finally, I will offer my own critiques of the methods of both O'Neill and Schwartzman, and will attempt to illustrate how both abstraction and idealisation may be problematic through a discussion of the concepts of essentialism and intersectionality. Finally, I will attempt to illustrate my methodological conclusions through investigation of a particular moral issue - one rarely discussed in philosophical literature - misgendering.

O'NEILL ON ABSTRACTION AND IDEALISATION

The origins of the recent philosophical feminist critique of abstraction in ethics may be most easily identified in a set of feminist challenges that have been made to the work of John Rawls. These

responses criticised Rawls for failing to significantly challenge patriarchal institutions, beliefs and practices in his *Theory of Justice*, and traced this failure to the kind of abstraction deployed in his formulation of the original position. There are a number of related charges here. One charge concerns the rationality of the hypothetical agents who reason in Rawls' original position. In abstracting away from the kinds of agents we actually find in the world, to characterise a more abstract sort of agent that exists in the original position, it is claimed Rawls removes the agents' knowledge of their position in society, particularly their class and economic status. He also arguably abstracts away from certain features of their rationality, leaving agents that only possess a "self-interested prudential rationality," and are "characterised as mutually disinterested, unaware of strong ties to others."[1] Some early feminist critics of Rawls suggested that these abstractions implicitly assumed a particular model of rationality that reflects a male bias, and ends up supporting the gender status quo, failing to challenge gender injustice.[2] A slightly different charge is that in abstracting away from any details about the specific political and social structures occupied by the agents supposed to be in the original position, Rawls has nonetheless left intact, and simply assumed the *justified* existence of certain patriarchal institutions and modes of social organisation, such as a family structure much like that found in our own society, and a coherent and legitimate division between private and public spheres of activity. Feminists have argued that by assuming these structures in his characterisation of the original position, Rawls has made them seem natural and unproblematic, put them beyond certain forms of moral and political criticism, and locked any inequality that may arise from them into the very structure of his theory of justice.[3]

O'Neill has, in a number of pieces, disputed these feminist criticisms of Rawls, agreeing with much of their description of the problem in Rawls' work, but disagreeing with their diagnosis of the problem. That is, O'Neill agrees that Rawls' formulation of the original position problematically makes unfounded assumptions which "[bury] the question of gender justice rather than resolving it."[4] However, she argues that this is not a problem resulting from abstraction, but rather from idealisation. O'Neill makes a great deal of this distinction. She understands abstraction to be a process of "*bracketing*, but not of *denying*, predicates that are true of

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1 Nussbaum (2003), "Rawls and Feminism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, ed. Freeman (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge), p. 492.
2 This charge is particularly pushed in Jaggar (1983), *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, (The Harvester Press: Sussex), p. 27- 48.
3 This charge, particularly pushed by Susan Okin, is described in Nussbaum (2003), p. 499-507.
4 O'Neill (1993), "Justice, Gender, and International Boundaries," in *The Quality of Life*, eds. Nussbaum & Sen. (Clarendon Press: Oxford), p. 310

the matter under discussion."[5] Abstraction is a kind of formalism. We stop talking about certain details, and move our reasoning to a higher level, where we can form more general principles.

Across her works she offers many reasons for engaging in abstraction, reflecting the fact that she attempts to defend abstraction from a number of different types of critic, including particularists, communitarians, political conservatives, relativists and feminists, offering each slightly different arguments, though she is not always successful at clearly distinguishing these distinct criticisms. Her reasons include that abstraction is theoretically and practically inevitable - "all uses of language must be more or less abstract; so must all reasoning"[6] - that it is common in practical thought, such as in law, and that it gives our conclusions wide scope, letting them cover a variety of situations.[7] She also suggests that "by pruning away assumptions whose truth cannot be ascertained, and relying on a meagre and parsimonious set of plausible assumptions, [we] lend credibility to [our] conclusions,"[8] and that abstraction is "indispensable to all communication that succeeds in the face of disagreement" and will reduce "the likelihood that [our reasoning] hinges on premises that others will dispute and that its conclusions will seem irrelevant to those others."[9]

At first glance this can seem precisely backwards. Surely, one might think, by failing to talk about some specific details and assumptions, we risk failing to notice when those details are *important*, and actually *make a difference.* Insofar as abstract communication succeeds in the face of disagreement, it does so by hiding disagreement, rather than resolving it; if interlocutors agree only when we abstract away from detail, and will once again disagree when that detail is returned, then the success of communication seems to be illusory. However, this thought depends on a misunderstanding of what O'Neill takes abstraction to involve. If abstraction is a kind of formalisation, a technique of merely bracketing detail so we can perform reasoning on less specified, less complicated, and less disputed grounds, then all valid reasoning done on that abstract level must remain valid when those specifications and complications are returned. Supposing we have abstracted correctly, and correctly reasoned on the abstract level, if disagreement returns when the detail returns, this points to our disagreement over those details; our agreement over the abstract principles should remain.

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5   O'Neill (1996), *Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge), p. 40.
6   O'Neill (1996), p. 40.
7   These three "prima facie defences" appear in O'Neill (1987), "Abstraction, Idealization, and Ideology in Ethics," in *Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Problems*, ed. J. D. G. Evans (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge)
8   O'Neill (1996), p. 39-40.
9   O'Neill (1988), "Ethical Reasoning and Ideological Pluralism," in *Ethics* 98:4, p. 711.

That is to say, when abstraction allows communication to succeed in the face of disagreement, it does this by creating agreement over something other than the disputed assumptions and details: agreement over the abstract principles. Of course, we might then say that abstraction allows communication to succeed in the face of disagreement only by changing the subject. This speaks to the necessary limitations of abstract reasoning. Abstract principles alone cannot determine what to say about the matters that we have abstracted away from. The need for deliberation in the application of abstract principles remains. Nonetheless, O'Neill finds abstract reasoning and abstract principles useful as they allow "disagreements to be formulated and debated in mutually comprehensible and accepted ways."[10]

A different problem arises when abstract reasoning proceeds, and perhaps gathers agreement, not just by bracketing details and assumptions, but by making "the further, unjustified assumption that features not mentioned were missing, or allow[ing] or even encourag[ing] others to assume that they were missing."[11] In these cases, reasoning proceeds by not only bracketing, but also denying predicates. This is a form of idealisation.

For O'Neill, idealisation is generally to be avoided. "An assumption, and derivatively a theory, idealizes when it ascribes predicates - often seen as enhanced, 'ideal' predicates - that are false of the case in hand, and so denies predicates that are true of that case."[12] Obvious cases of idealisation may include an economist's assumption of rational, self-interested economic agents, or a utilitarian's working through some example with a hypothetical agent assumed to have perfect knowledge of a complex situation.

Idealisation produces theories which are "inapplicable to the human case."[13] "Reasoning that idealizes does make claims that hinge on the objects to which it is applied satisfying certain predicates. Where those predicates are unsatisfied the reasoning simply does not apply."[14] O'Neill identifies idealisation as what is going wrong in the cases that feminists had previously picked out as problematic uses of abstraction. So, for example, Rawls idealises by assuming agents in the original position to possess only a self-interested rationality, which is false of agents in the actual world, and by structuring some considerations of justice around an idealised kind of family structure, which not all actual families resemble, and to which not all agents belong.

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10 O'Neill (1988), p. 719.
11 O'Neill (1996), p. 40, ft. 7.
12 O'Neill (1996), p. 41.
13 O'Neill (1996), p. 41.
14 O'Neill (1993), p. 309.

For O'Neill, the problem with this kind of idealisation is not only that the idealised predicates are false. She suggests that she could accept the use of such idealised models, provided those using them "offer reasons for starting from the idealizing assumptions - which might require demanding metaphysical arguments,"[15] and so long as care is taken when applying these models to actual circumstances. She obviously thinks the conditions on proper use of idealisation are not met by Rawls, who "takes for granted that there is some just 'sexual contract,' that justice can presuppose a legitimate separation of 'private' from 'public' discourses."[16] The thrust of O'Neill argument definitely suggests that she finds these conditions to be rarely met, and believes that idealisation is generally best avoided from the start.

MILLS ON IDEAL THEORY

Though we'll return to O'Neill soon, it's worth looking at how Charles Mills has developed and extended O'Neill's objections to idealisation into his own critique of ideal theory. Though Mills identifies his work on ideal theory as contributing to the development of "an ethical strategy best and most self-consciously developed in feminist theory in the writings of Onora O'Neill,"[17] his understanding of idealisation is much broader than O'Neill's, and he sometimes seems quite critical of the kind of methodology that O'Neill wants to employ.

Mills identifies "ideal theory" as a particular way of doing moral philosophy, roughly a way that involves trying to discover moral truth by examining various idealised models of ethical agents, behaviour, and situations. Though he rarely specifically identifies his philosophical targets, he clearly identifies ideal theory with the dominant approach in modern moral and political philosophy, and specifically mentions Rawls as engaging in this kind of theory.[18] He distinguishes this approach from nonideal theory, which involves closer attention to the ethical realities of our world.[19] He identifies nonideal theory as the approach of most feminist moral philosophers, early Marxists (insofar as they departed from Hegelians in their attention to the realities of class), and those working in race theory.[20]

> "What distinguishes ideal theory is the reliance on idealization to the exclusion, or at least
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> marginalization, of the actual. As O'Neill emphasizes, this is *not* a necessary corollary of the

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15   O'Neill (1996), p. 41.
16   O'Neill (1993), p. 310.
17   Mills (2005), ""Ideal Theory" as Ideology," in *Hypatia* 20:3, p. 165.
18   See Mills (2005), p. 169.
19   It is perhaps easiest to get an idea of what nonideal theory might look like, for Mills, by looking at Mills (1997) *The Racial Contract* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca).
20   See Mills (2005), p. 170.

operation of abstraction itself, since one can have abstractions [...] that abstract without idealizing. But ideal theory either tacitly represents the actual as a simple deviation from the ideal, not worth theorizing in its own right, or claims that starting from the ideal is at least the best way of realizing it."[21]

Mills offers a list of six kinds of assumptions and methods that may be employed in ideal theory[22]:

- Idealised social ontology: an account of the agents under moral consideration which abstracts away from, ignores, and fails to account for realities, such as oppression and hierarchy, which in actuality profoundly shape the moral situation of the agents that exist in our society. This is a form of idealisation, rather than mere abstraction, because the theorists do not just fail to talk about these realities, but also produce a kind of theory that depends upon their absence[23], and so fails to apply to a world in which these features operate. Mills identifies this feature of ideal theory in the kind of abstract individualism that Jaggar identified in liberal theory.[24]

- Idealised Capacities: attributing unrealistic capacities to the agents included in the theory, and ignoring differences in capacities, especially those that might result from differences in opportunities to develop capacities. This form of idealisation seems particularly rife in moral theory, and Mills specifically mentions idealisation of agents' "degrees of rationality, self-knowledge, ability to make interpersonal cardinal utility comparisons, and the like."[25]

- Silence on Oppression: ideal theory says little or nothing about past oppression, its legacy, or current ongoing oppression. Of course, this silence also forms part of the other features of ideal theory, but I believe Mills wants to emphasise here the importance to non-ideal moral theory of taking oppression seriously as a subject matter for moral theory, in addition to considering how it must influence the more abstract structure of our theories. This feature may be just an issue with certain kinds of abstraction, rather than idealisation per se, as Mills' specific concern here is not necessarily that ideal theories may tacitly assume that past and current oppression does not exist, but just that failure to discuss these ethical realities will lead to a theory lacking the resources or concepts to understand or deal with them. However, it is also clear that Mills sees this feature as deeply bound up with, and as

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21 Mills (2005), p. 168.
22 See Mills (2005), p. 168-169.
23 Recall this is what O'Neill objects to in O'Neill (1996), p. 40, ft. 7.
24 See Jaggar (1983), p. 27- 48.
25 Mills (2005), p. 168.

tending to lead to, the forms of idealisation he discusses.

- Ideal Social Institutions: institutions such as the family and the economic system are introduced as idealised models, "with little or no sense of how their actual workings may systematically disadvantage women, the poor, and racial minorities."[26]

- An Idealised Cognitive Sphere: differing subtly but importantly from the issue of idealised capacities, this feature concerns the way that ideal theory ignores the effects of oppression on the social cognition of both the oppressed and the privileged, in such a way as to ignore actual difficulties certain groups will have understanding the social and moral situation faced by others, and to privilege the kind of information and concepts available to, and supportive of, the privileged. This often manifests as an assumption that normatively significant facts and reasons must be straightforwardly available to all moral agents, and may make it impossible to account for concerns such as those raised by feminist epistemologies, epistemologies of ignorance, and discussions of ideology.[27]

- Strict Compliance: perhaps the original use of "ideal theory," as used by John Rawls, this involves the methodological assumption that the best way to identify the best moral theory or political arrangement will be by looking at a theoretical construct in which every agent is assumed to always act in full compliance with the normative requirements set down by the moral theory under consideration. This involves idealisation both in its assumption of agents that, contrary to the behaviour of actual agents, always obey moral requirements, and in its assumption, contrary to the actual history of the world, of a political situation where agents always *had* acted in accordance with moral rules, and so there is no history of injustice to be addressed.

After failing to find any good reason to believe that these kinds of approaches might constitute the best way to get at moral truths, or bring about a more ideal society, Mills identifies ideal theory as an ideology. He argues these features are "a distortional complex of ideas, values, norms, and beliefs that reflects the nonrepresentative interests and experiences of a small minority of the national population—middle-to-upper-class white males—who are hugely *over-represented* in the professional philosophical population."[28]

The relationship between Mills' thoughts and those of O'Neill is complex, though perhaps

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26 Mills (2005), p. 169.
27 See, for example, Mills (2007), "White Ignorance," in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance,* eds. Sullivan and Tuana (SUNY Press: Albany). I will discuss this issue in more detail in chapters 5 & 6.
28 Mills (2005), p. 172.

ultimately remains fairly harmonious. Most of the features Mills identifies in ideal theory can be seen as a form of idealisation, in O'Neill's sense, but his critical attention is not always so sharply focused on idealisation as O'Neill's, and even just from the above list we can already see some suspicions regarding certain forms of abstraction, quite apart from the issue of idealisation; note how he objects to mere silence on oppression, and not only the idealised assumption of its absence. Though Mills acknowledges and agrees with O'Neill's point that idealisation is not a necessary result of abstraction, he is also critical of certain kinds of abstraction which do not appear to idealise, in O'Neill's sense, including some that O'Neill engages in herself.

Mills rarely directly talks about abstraction in this paper. The biggest exception to this comes when he explicitly defends the use of abstraction, against the claims of particularists (also a major target of O'Neill's). However, this defence does not make much use of the concept of idealisation. Rather, it grants the particularist point that dominant abstractions in moral theory can be problematic, but claims that the problem with these abstractions "arguably arises not from abstraction and generality per se, but an abstraction and generality that *abstract away* from gender and race... What one wants are abstractions... that capture the essentials of the situation of women and nonwhites, not abstract away from them."[29] Though Mills obviously thinks that *this kind* of abstraction is bound up, perhaps necessarily, with idealisation, he nonetheless seems to be simply objecting to a certain use of abstraction, that which abstracts away from, or in O'Neill's sense brackets, forms of oppression. Again, he sees a specific problem merely with silence on oppression.

It is telling that the kind of abstract entities that Mills is eager to defend the use of are quite different to those of O'Neill. Where O'Neill is interested in the defence of abstract *principles* and a formalised Kantian methodology, Mills is interested in defending abstract concepts such as *patriarchy*, *white supremacy* and *class society*.[30] We can immediately see how Mills' abstract concepts could not be a part of ideal theory, as they are entirely orientated around theorising oppression, and would have no place in a theory based on strict compliance, where we must assume such inherently negatively understood social structures would simply not be present. This is in sharp contrast to O'Neill's abstract principles, and her abstract concept of *autonomy*, which would be as much at home in an ideal theory as in a nonideal theory.

In fact, it seems as though O'Neill commits precisely the kind of abstraction that Mills objects to. In short, she abstracts away from, or brackets, gender and race. Looking at the brief

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29 Mills (2005), p. 173.
30 Mills (2005), p. 173, 175.

illustration of her abstract method in *Justice, Gender, and International Boundaries*, she starts only with the assumption of a plurality of interacting and diverse agents, and asks what basic principles for action such a plurality could adopt, consistent with their remaining that plurality.[31] Of course, O'Neill has not idealised here. She has not assumed, or even implied the absence of oppression, or the moral insignificance of gender and race. Indeed, this paper is specifically concerned with demonstrating how her theory can be particularly fruitful in dealing with these issues. Though explicit mention of gender and race are absent in her abstraction, she soon mentions them in her justification for *using* this kind of abstraction, and gender is discussed in some detail in her illustration of an abstract principle's application.

Along these lines, one may argue that although O'Neill has not, at this point, talked specifically about gender, race, or oppression, she nonetheless is concerned to capture them in her abstract principles. Though she initially abstracts away from these things, her choice of exactly what to abstract away from is strongly guided by these concerns. We can see this in more detail in *Towards Justice and Virtue*. Here O'Neill is clear that the abstract agents characterising her methodology display plurality, connection, and finitude.[32] That is, there are separate agents, they can act on each other, and their powers are limited. She insist that these features of agents are ones that we cannot, must not abstract away from, and she explicitly mentions how denying these features could play a role in promoting oppression and injustice.[33] This resembles Mills' insistence that we must not abstract away from gender and race. Could we perhaps say that although O'Neill has not included gender and race in her abstraction, she has nonetheless managed to "capture the essentials of the situation of women and nonwhites"?[34] Certainly, this way of getting at the autonomy of abstract agents explicitly avoids the feminist concerns that Mills mentions in his brief discussion of traditional conceptions of autonomy.[35]

However, despite her intentions, and the uses of her theory, I think it would be too generous to suggest that O'Neill's abstraction (as opposed to her later application of abstract principles) really captures the essentials of the situation of women and nonwhites. Though that situation does include being finite, interdependent, interconnected agents, it also crucially involves living under conditions of oppression. This last feature is not included among her initial

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31 O'Neill (1993), p. 313-5
32 O'Neill (1996), p. 101. See also p. 106 ft. 24
33 O'Neill (1996), p. 107-113.
34 Mills (2005), p. 32.
35 Mills (2005), p. 177.

abstractions.

Why then do I suggest that the thought of Mills and O'Neill is ultimately harmonious? This has to do with how O'Neill sees the move from abstract principles to our application of those principles. Now, Mills is actually very critical of attempts to defend ideal theory by simply gesturing towards such a division, and of any view that claims engaging with the concrete ethics conditions of the world "is just a matter of *applying* principles, not of *theory* (applied ethics rather than ethical theory)."[36] He discusses and rejects the idea that "nonideal theory and its various prescriptions are somehow already "contained" within ideal theory."[37] However, O'Neill also importantly rejects precisely this idea, with regard to abstract principles. Contrary to the dismissive tone of the ideal theorists Mills is targeting, O'Neill sees the task of getting from principles to applications as rather involved and complicated. She rejects the idea that principles must determine their own application - that application is somehow contained within principles – and emphasises the point that application is a matter of judgement and deliberation.[38] Indeed, she identifies overly meagre and cursory accounts of deliberation as the motivating force behind most particularist objections to abstraction.[39]

Again, O'Neill's sentiments are echoed by Mills, who identifies the problem with most ideal theorists who dismiss the importance of application as "a failure to appreciate the nature and magnitude of the obstacles to the cognitive rethinking required, and the mistaken move... from the ease of logical implication to the actual inferential patterns of human cognizers who have been socialized by... systems of domination."[40] He emphasises what is required to make ideal theories inclusive of and applicable to the marginalised cannot simply be a matter of terminological extension, nor "spun out, a priori,"[41] from the theory's concepts. Rather, to take the example of theorising about the family, "they require empirical input and an awareness of how the real-life, *non*ideal family actually works. But insofar as such input is crucial and guides theory (which is why it's incorrect to see this as just "applied" ethics), *the theory ceases to be ideal*."[42]

Looking both at what O'Neill says about moral deliberation, and an actual illustration of the application of her principles to the situation of poor women in poor economies, we can see that

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36 Mills (2005), p. 177.
37 Mills (2005), p. 177.
38 See O'Neill (1988), p. 719, O'Neill (1993), p. 316, and O'Neill (1987), p. 64.
39 O'Neill (1987), p. 65.
40 Mills (2005), p. 178.
41 Mills (2005), p. 178.
42 Mills (2005), p. 178, emphasis his.

she is eager to engage in exactly the kind of nonideal, empirically-informed theorising that Mills requires. In "Justice, Gender, and International Boundaries" she discusses (albeit briefly) such issues as the undervaluing of women's labour, problems arising from family structures, the problem of identifying consent under conditions of inability, incapacity, and commitment to others, differences in economic power, and problems arising from women's isolation, seclusion, and lack of access to education.[43] In short, she discusses how actual institutions render some women powerless and vulnerable. Though her abstract principles may not, her *application* of principles does seek to capture the essentials of the situation of women, at least of the women under discussion. Though she initially abstracts from these features, she ultimately insists that in "applying abstract, non-idealizing principles we have to take account... of others' actual *capacities* and *opportunities* to act – and their incapacities and lack of opportunities."[44] Ultimately, O'Neill has a methodology that Mills would identify as nonideal.

However, while the thought of Mills and O'Neill might be compatible, it would be well not to overestimate their similarity. It remains a striking fact that the work of Mills and O'Neill seems so distinct, that Mills maintains a sharp focus on oppression, nonideal moral systems[45], and actual conditions of injustice, where O'Neill spends relatively less time focusing on these details, wants to at least start theorising from a higher, more abstract level, and is more content to see Mills' concerns as matters of application (though perhaps not *merely* application in the dismissive sense). This difference seems to come, again, to a difference in treatment of the role and objective of abstraction. I will continue to look at the role of abstraction in moral theory by examining Lisa Schwartzman's objections to O'Neill's use of abstraction and idealisation.

Schwartzman on O'Neill's Abstraction and Idealisation

In her book *Challenging Liberalism: Feminism as Political Critique* Lisa Schwartzman delivers a sustained attack on the abstraction that she sees as central to liberal political thought.[46] This includes a specific critique of O'Neill's defence of abstraction. Though Schwartzman is sensitive to many of the same problems as O'Neill and Mills, she insists again that abstraction is at the heart of these problems, and even defends the use of specific ideals in moral theory, though perhaps not idealisations in O'Neill's sense. Like O'Neill and Mills, she acknowledges that abstraction, in some

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43 O'Neill (1993), p. 317-321.
44 O'Neill (1993), p. 321.
45 As explored in Mills (1997).
46 Schwartzman (2006), *Challenging Liberalism: Feminism and Political Critique*, (Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park, PA).

forms, may be useful or unavoidable, but, in contrast to O'Neill, she insists that it is a mistake to employ methods that aim at creating highly abstract models.[47] Her point is sharply methodological; it is not that abstract reasoning or liberal theory cannot be employed in ways that are supportive of feminist critique, but rather that they will *tend* to lead us astray.[48]

Schwartzman's critique of abstraction is lengthy and well developed, but rests on many of the same points more briefly touched on by O'Neill and Mills. She develops her critique of abstraction primarily through close examinations of the work of Ronald Dworkin and John Rawls, and it is striking that many of the problems she identifies in their theories would obviously count as idealisations in O'Neill's sense. For example, she suggests that Dworkin goes astray by theorising about a hypothetical scenario where abstract agents possess more knowledge than actual agents do, by falsely assuming that inequalities in society result merely from lack of resources rather than systematic oppression, and by falsely assuming a coherent concept of ambition which is independent from an agent's circumstances.[49] All three of these would straightforwardly be identified by O'Neill as idealisations.

Late in the book, she even states "The problem is not that liberalism makes use of abstraction in [O'Neill's bracketing] sense; rather, it is that liberal methods of abstraction often permit objectionable features of the social structure to enter into a theory despite the bracketing."[50] Again, this seems like a straightforward endorsement of O'Neill's idea that idealisation, rather than abstraction, is the problem. Nonetheless, Schwartzman takes herself to be objecting to O'Neill's methodology, and it is clear that their actual approaches to the methodology of moral philosophy are very different.

A difficulty that arises in discussing Schwartzman's objections of O'Neill is that, though she takes the concept from O'Neill's work, she nonetheless seems to operate with a slightly different understanding of idealisation than O'Neill gives us. The most significant difference is that Schwartzman draws a distinction between two types of idealisation, where O'Neill does not clearly make this distinction. Initially, Schwartzman identifies idealisation as the act of adding to allegedly abstract theories assumptions that "presuppose particular conceptions of human rationality, independence, preference formation, or some other capacity," which are false of actual agents, and "tend to privilege men, whites, upper-middle-class people, and others who have power within

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47 Schwartzman (2006), p. 8.
48 See Schwartzman (2006), p. 3-4.
49 Schwartzman (2006), p. 37-53.
50 Schwartzman (2006), p. 160.

sociopolitical structures."[51] This is consistent with O'Neill's stated idea of idealisation, though Schwartzman notes that O'Neill does not include this explicit focus on the issue of sociopolitical power in her account of idealisation.

However, Schwartzman identifies a second type of idealisation, which she suggests is also described and criticised by O'Neill, and which involves a theory's aspiring "to particular ideals that it posits as worthy and desirable goals but that are unproved and merely assumed from the start."[52] She also describes these as "ideals that the theorist acknowledges are not yet descriptive of actual persons but are offered as goals to be achieved."[53]

Clearly identifying this line of thought in O'Neill's work is difficult. Though she does occasionally speak about the dangers of "assuming unvindicated ideals,"[54] these passages are completely bound up with her discussion of idealisation in the previously discussed sense. Her thought seems to run as follows: some theorists, as they attempt to abstract, also idealise, in the sense of assuming capacities and situations that are false of actual agents. These idealisations tend to operate by attributing, to agents, conformity to some 'ideal,'[55] such as that of perfect rationality or independence. So, in idealisation, some particular ideal is posited, or implied. This is dangerous both because the 'ideals' may lack justification, and because "agents and institutions who fail to measure up to supposed ideals may be blamed for the misfit."[56]

Schwartzman's interpretation of O'Neill separates O'Neill's discussion of 'ideals' from her discussion of idealisation in the original, narrow sense, and attributes to O'Neill a blanket objection to all use of ideals that have not been explicitly justified, whether or not those appear in the context of some act of idealisation. It is simply unclear whether O'Neill intends her objections to 'ideals' to spread this far. However, it does seem that such a reading is consistent with O'Neill's goals in her project of finding abstract principles. As we have seen, O'Neill engages in abstraction partly in order to reduce "the likelihood that [our reasoning] hinges on premises that others will dispute."[57] Or, more particularly, as O'Neill is looking to find basic abstract principles that could be adopted by, and shared, by a plurality of agents, she must reject the use of particular ideals that are only

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51 Schwartzman (2006), p. 79.
52 Schwartzman (2006), p. 80.
53 Schwartzman (2006), p. 81.
54 O'Neill (1996), p. 43.
55 O'Neill herself tends to enclose the word 'ideal' in scare quotes here, presumably to indicate that these putative ideals are not genuinely ideal, but rather idealised reflections of the position of certain dominant social agents. See O'Neill (1996), p. 42-43. See also O'Neill (1993), p. 312.
56 O'Neill (1996) p. 42.
57 O'Neill (1988), p. 711.

available to particular agents, perhaps because of their contingent historical circumstances, or their particular social situation. Presumably, if such ideals were available to all agents, they would be abstractly justifiable. So, though O'Neill is not always so clear on this, it seems Schwartzman would be right to suggest that it is in keeping with O'Neill's project to reject the use of specific, unvindicated ideals.

It may help to consider an example here. Take an ideal of "righteous resistance to domination." Such an ideal may not be justifiable to everyone, particularly not to those who live in some (counter-factual) society where domination does occur, and perhaps not to those who do not suffer under domination in the actual society they inhabit. Even leaving abstract concerns about rationality aside, we may want to employ such an ideal while simply not *concerning* ourselves and our moral theory with finding ways to justify this ideal to those to whom it is less accessible.[58] This is the kind of ideal that Schwartzman wants to make room for, and which O'Neill's methodology seems to rule out, as its use would hinge on premises that others would dispute.

But, of course, O'Neill's reasoning here would not stop merely at ruling out the use of specific unjustified ideals, but rather would extend to excluding, from our most abstract practical reasoning, the use of any particular conceptualisations when those conceptualisations are not, in some sense, available to all of the agents in some plurality. This restriction seems to be demanded by O'Neill's methodology whether or not the conceptualisations can be seen as, in any way, ideals. Schwartzman identifies this thought in O'Neill's work, specifically as O'Neill aiming to "proceed without any particular conception of gender or national sovereignty."[59]

We can look more closely at the concept of gender to see how this restriction seems to be called for by O'Neill's method. The way that various groups in society, and across societies, conceptualise gender will differ wildly. The understanding of gender held by a 'complementarian' Christian will differ from that of a second wave radical feminist, and perhaps again from that of a more recent, more inclusive feminist, and again from members of a number of non-European societies which recognise various non-binary systems of gender. Not all of these ideas of gender will count as even purported ideals. Perhaps most clearly the complementarian Christian's may, insofar as they see gender as consisting of a mapping of normative social behaviours onto a set of 'natural' physical traits. However the second wave radical feminist's certainly won't, insofar as they see gender as a distinctly non-ideal system of categorisation, created and enforced by patriarchy,

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58 I discuss why we might want to do this in Chapter 6.
59 Schwartzman (2006), p. 82.

and central to the oppression of certain classes of people. More importantly, these various understandings of gender do not look to be in principle available to all agents. Understanding the complementarian Christian's concept would require at least familiarity with, and perhaps commitment to, a certain Christian worldview, including its particular history and social context. Understanding the radical feminist's concept would require some familiarity with the particular form and history of patriarchy in some society, and perhaps a stance of opposition to that patriarchy.[60] If *these* concepts can be seen as in principle available to all agents, surely all must be. If they are not, then, for O'Neill, they must be kept out of our most abstract moral theorising.

Schwartzman writes "O'Neill is not suggesting that we simply replace false or oppressive conceptions of rationality, independence, gender, and national sovereignty with ones that are more accurate or less oppressive, but rather that we attempt to theorize without employing *any* particular conceptions at all."[61] This is certainly too strong; O'Neill herself recognises "*Every* articulation of a situation privileges certain categories and descriptions".[62] We are allowed some concepts, so long as they are in principle available to all, and there may be a lot of room to dispute what kinds of concepts that may be true of. However, what does seem to be true is that a lot of the concepts most important for understanding and articulating some of the most pressing issues in moral philosophy, and certainly those, such as *patriarchy* and *white supremacy*, which Mills insisted we must use, will be disqualified from O'Neill's highest level of moral thinking.

So long as we are only considering the disqualification of specific conceptions from our most abstract level of practical reasoning – the discovery and articulation of abstract principles – this is nothing new. I've already pointed out that notions such as race and gender do not appear in O'Neill's most abstract reasoning, but suggested that this might not be a problem so long as some critical understanding of these concepts appeared in the application of principles. However, Schwartzman wants to suggest that O'Neill aims to keep any particular conceptualisations out of our applied reasoning as well, that she supposes "ideals can be avoided not only in the construction of abstract principles but also in their application."[63] This does seem to be suggested by O'Neill's claim that we can "take account of the context and particularities of lives and societies" without endorsing "established ideals of gender and of national sovereignty," and that

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60   It would probably require undergoing some transformative experience of feminist awakening, as I discuss in chapter 6.
61   Schwartzman (2006), p. 82.
62   O'Neill (1987), p. 66.
63   Schwartzman (2006), p. 82.

we can "take account of *certain* differences" without "tacitly reintroducing restricted ideals (e.g. by privileging certain views of gender and sovereignty)".[64] Though she is much less clear about this, it may be that O'Neill is as eager to keep disputed and non-sharable conceptions out of her application of principles as she is to keep them out of her abstract formulation of principles. Schwartzman objects to this both on the grounds that the use of specific ideals or conceptions is unavoidable (she suggests O'Neill unwittingly relies on a certain ideal of personhood, which focuses on and supremely values rational agency)[65], and that careful deployment of non-oppressive ideals is "crucial in challenging false and ideological 'idealizations.'"[66] Michèle Le Doeuff has made a similar point in objecting to a kind of rigour aimed at "pruning everything that is not acceptable to all at the outset... [which] produces both boredom and illusion at the same time: no one succeeds in pruning as much as is necessary."[67]

It is worth looking more closely at whether and why O'Neill keeps deployment of specific conceptions and ideals out of the process of applying principles. At the end of her article *Justice, Gender, and International Boundaries*, O'Neill briefly illustrates the application of principles to specific cases in a three-page discussion of the lives of poor women in poor economies.[68] This discussion focuses on women's vulnerability to deception and economic coercion, their dependence on problematic institutions, such as family structures or potentially exploitative financial instruments, and their lack of opportunities to dissent from or challenge their political situation. She concludes with "The most significant features of actual situations that must be taken into account in judgements about justice are the security or vulnerability that allow actual others to dissent from and to seek change in the arrangements which structure their lives."[69]

On the one hand this discussion is marked by an engaged examination of the actual conditions of some women's lives, and the structures and situations that promote their exploitation. On the other, it does indeed seem to shy away from the deployment of any significant concepts we might use to understand that situation except those, like deception and dependence, which are easily derived from her abstract principles, or the basic "circumstances of justice"[70] to which all principles are meant to apply. She certainly does not employ the kinds of strongly

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64 O'Neill (1993), p. 305.
65 Schwartzman (2006), p. 84-85.
66 Schwartzman (2006), p. 88-93.
67 Le Doeuff (1991), *Hipparchia's Choice*, trans. Trista Selous (Columbia University Press: New York), p. 221.
68 O'Neill (1993), p. 319-321.
69 O'Neill (1993), p. 321.
70 See O'Neill (1989), *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge University Press: New York), p. 212.

specific (though still abstract) concepts like 'patriarchy' and 'white supremacy' advocated and employed by Mills. She rather attempts to describe the circumstances of poor women in much less theoretically loaded ways. The worry is that she may be implicitly relying on some kind of idea that the facts of the situation of poor women can be simply read off of an abstract examination of their situation, without the need to engage in any significant theoretical work, or to actively find ways to understand the situation that take us beyond the immediately available or apparent.

Consider O'Neill's employment, in this discussion, of a fairly non-theoretical term. Of course, O'Neill does discuss "women" in her illustration of application; she could hardly consider 'the lives of poor women in poor economies' without doing so. However, how does this sit with her reluctance to reintroduce particular conceptions of gender? Is this allowed because although she is talking about women, she is not committing herself to any particular conception of gender, not "privileging certain views of gender"? Not committing to any particular idea of what women are? This line of thought may be dangerous. It de facto treats gender as an unproblematic category, as something that it is okay to just talk about or employ as though we all know what is being discussed.[71] This risks naturalising gender, treating it as an obviously *acceptable* category, as a thing that we can all roughly use without specific understanding because it roughly describes some category of things that *just are* in the world. There are two significant problems with this approach.

Firstly, it ignores and marginalises those on the boundaries of certain gender systems. By leaving any specific understanding of gender out of our *application* of a principle, we produce a judgement that simply has nothing to say about certain disputed cases regarding who our judgement applies to. At best our judgement is indeterminate regarding these people, at worst it simply fails to apply to them, and in so doing implicitly buys into the systems that excluded them. Rather than dealing with the problem of how to apply certain principles to certain marginalised people, O'Neill's approach may risk erasing these people and their problems from her theory.

Of course, she would have plenty of room to perform some separate analysis of the conditions of such people, who are liable to be deeply disadvantaged by their liminal social position, but she seems to have lost room to include these people under the same analysis she applies to the less contested population, even when that analysis is directly relevant. More importantly she loses the ability to specifically examine how these people's disadvantaged

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71 Note retreating to a category such as "biological sex" would not get us very far, as this category is no less of a socially constructed idealisation than gender, and is certainly still far from completely unproblematic. See Fausto-Sterling (2000), *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (Basic Books: New York).

situation may be, in perhaps complicated ways, related to the oppression that operates on those who more straightforwardly clearly fit establishment categories. For example, in western society, examining the condition of trans women as an entirely separate activity from examining the condition of cisgender women would not only be offensive to trans women, but would also result in an inadequate analysis, one that struggled to take into account the way such women are specifically disadvantaged by the forces, such as misogyny, that operate against women in general. This approach would seem to close off the possibility of any intersectional analysis.[72]

Secondly, this approach seems to implicitly rule out non-ideal conceptions of gender, those which may see straightforward employment of gender categories, in the absence of a critical understanding of those categories, as involving endorsement of, or complicity in, an oppressive and patriarchal system of categorisation. Further, her abstract and non-committal use of the term "women" may rule out, from the application of her principles, those situated in radically different, perhaps non-binary understandings of gender which may even not straightforwardly include any class of people sufficiently analogous to the theorist's particular category "women," *even if* there are some people whose *circumstances* are sufficiently analogous to warrant their inclusion in this particular judgement. Perhaps we could try to avoid this situation by simply defining 'women' in our judgement regarding 'the lives of women in poor economies' as 'those people whose circumstances are sufficiently similar to *x* to be relevant to this discussion'; however this would seem to, in effect, constitute introducing and privileging a new particular notion of 'women'. All of these concerns clearly echo Schwartzman's worry that avoiding privileging any specific conceptions or ideals may be impossible, and that attempting to do so runs the risk of simply privileging dominant, ideological views.

We may get a better idea of what is going on here if we closely examine why O'Neill may want to keep specific conceptions and ideals out of the application of abstract principles. In particular, my worry that O'Neill might have an overly simple idea of what it takes to understand the particulars of a case under judgement, that she might expect us to simply read the facts off a cursory examination of the situation, is completely at odds with her stated goals. She has written a great deal about how we must take seriously the difficulties involving in appraising, or describing a situation under moral consideration, and always insists "Situations do not come handily pre-classified for subsumption under one and only one ethical rule or principle, which prescribes quite

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72   I will be discussing intersectionality later in this chapter.

determinate action."[73] Furthermore, her insistence on this is partly tied to her concerns about ideology, as she claims that "Ways of reasoning that assume that 'the facts' of human situations can be uncontroversially stated are likely to be dominated by established and often by establishment views. Without a critical account of the selection of minor premises, ethical reasoning may avoid formalism only to become hostage to local ideology,"[74] and again

> In contexts of action questions are begged (usually in favour of received views) if some 'obvious' account of a problem or an area of life is taken for granted. In ethical deliberation, as elsewhere, it matters who controls the agenda. An adequate account of reasoning that can guide action must include not only principles of action (the major premises) but an account of judgement which explains why particular situations should be grasped under one rather than another possible description (the minor premises).[75]

Though these quotes show agreement with Mills' and Schwartzman's insistence that we must give careful thought to actual moral situations and how we understand them, where O'Neill significantly differs is in identifying the antidote to establishment views and local ideology simply in an account of judgement, or a "critical account of the selection of minor premises," rather than in any significant abstract theorising about oppression, ideology and social injustice. So, one further reason that O'Neill does not feel the need to develop and employ, or perhaps even allow, specific theoretical conceptions along the lines of *patriarchy* or *white supremacy* is that she believes the work done by these concepts, the work of understanding the moral cases before us, understanding, for example, "the essentials of the situation of women and nonwhites,"[76] can be done purely by the employment of some number of strategies for appraising situations which can be developed out of an abstract account of practical reasoning, along with our abstract principles.

O'Neill goes into some small detail about these strategies in her paper *The Power of Example*[77], where she categorises them into two groups. The first are roughly rules of thumb or maxims for thinking about and challenging our own initial construals of situations, maxims along the lines of "take account of differences of information" or "remember differences between intention and achievement."[78] These kinds of strategies seem familiar from mainstream moral philosophy, and I would doubt their ability to, alone, take us far from our own, perhaps

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73 O'Neill (1987), p. 63.
74 O'Neill (1987), p. 65.
75 O'Neill (1986), *Faces of Hunger* (Allen & Unwin: London), p. 29.
76 Mills (2005), p. 173
77 O'Neill (1986) "The Power of Example" in *Philosophy* 61, pp. 5-29.
78 O'Neill (1986), p. 26

ideological, starting points. More interesting are the second kind of strategies, which are strategies for seeking to share a view with others. These include maxims like "listen to the other's reasons" or "always to try to expand rather than to narrow one's horizons."[79] They are distinctly strategies that call for more than reflection, introspection, or careful thinking.[80]

This focus on communication and finding shared views is a major theme in O'Neill's moral philosophy, and is supposed to do much of the work of getting us away from established viewpoints and local ideology. The idea seems to be that through certain deliberative strategies, by all the people facing a moral issue finding ways to communicate with one another, some shared way of construing the situation will be found, or, more importantly, constructed. This plurality of people will include all parties to the issue - the powerful and the weak, oppressed and oppressors, victims, perpetrators and allies, individual agents and representatives of institutions – each with their own distinct needs, interests, ideologies and viewpoints. Presumably this new shared construal will not simply keep views as they were, or reiterate establishment ideologies, as some parties to the communicative process will refuse to accept and share some view that works against their moral interests, will refuse to be ideologically complicit in their own unjust situation. We mustn't think O'Neill has a simplistic view of this process. It is not simply a matter of parties talking until they find some set of descriptions that they can all agree on. Rather, this process "often has to work by means of transformations of consciousness and ideology."[81] Individuals are changed by the process, they "acquire new ways of seeing the world"[82] rather than simply new terms to describe an unchanged moral picture.

So the difference, here, between the methodologies of O'Neill on the one hand, and Schwartzman and Mills on the others, is that while the latter are eager to engage in theoretical activity designed to uncover and challenge dominant ideologies through the development of less oppressive, and anti-oppressive concepts, O'Neill thinks this work can be done by employing fairly abstract and schematic strategies of moral deliberation, based on challenging our own worldviews through consensus-building critical engagement with the views of others. In fact, she seems to be deeply opposed to the the former method, convinced that it must lead to endorsement of dominant ideology.[83]

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79 O'Neill (1986), p. 25-6.
80 More illuminating discussion of these strategies appears in O'Neill (1987), p. 67-69.
81 O'Neill (1986), p. 42.
82 O'Neill (1986), p. 47.
83 The only significant discussion in O'Neill's work, that I've come across, of theories that engage directly with the situation of the oppressed is a brief note about Carol Gilligan's work on moral sense theory, a particular theory

My worry with regard to O'Neill's methodology is that, though it seems her general strategies could indeed be useful for moral thinking, limiting moral philosophy to these general strategies and abstract principles, against the use of less abstract, more social aware theorising, will prevent us, collectively, from having the kinds of tools, concepts, knowledge and theories we would need to *bring to* her general strategies. The worry is essentially one of false consciousness, or, roughly, the idea that agents may be systematically alienated from their own interests. Her method relies on the possibility of interested parties being able to articulate and present their interests. However, she has not given parties enough space to discover, understand, and align themselves to their own interests. In a situation where masses of agents are alienated from their own interests, or ideologically committed to their own oppression, her method simply will not yield the ideologically challenging results she is after.

Mere communication and reflection will never be enough unless someone has done the work of developing the ideas, concepts, and theories they need in order to communicate the best account of their own situation. O'Neill's methodology is one that presumes that there *will be* feminists, anti-racist activists, and others around to articulate a liberatory viewpoint of the oppressed. Perhaps, we might say, this is not too worrying an assumption; after all, these *are* such people, and perhaps there always *will be* people who resist under conditions of oppression. However, O'Neill's methodology doesn't seem to give such people the space and tools to develop their theories, to engage in theorising, *moral* theorising. At best, it allows such processes to go on, but does not grant them the title of 'moral philosophy.' This is essentially the charge that Schwartzman eventually raises against liberalism - though not specifically against O'Neill – that although it is very capable of accommodating feminist critique, it is ill-suited for generating that critique in the first place.[84]

Schwartzman's Alternative Methodology, Essentialism & Intersectionality

Though Schwartzman's main concern is to challenge abstract liberal methodologies in moral and political philosophy, she occasionally gives some insight into what her preferred alternative methodology would look like. This appears most clearly after an extensive discussion of

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which O'Neill correctly notes seems to be committed to a problematic gender essentialism, one that sees certain actual differences between men and women in our society as innate or natural. See O'Neill (1993), p. 307. From this she seems to conclude that, in all non-abstract feminist theorising, "differences are taken seriously only when actual differences are endorsed." This ignores the possibility of theory which engages with social differences understood to be *a result of* social oppression. Catharine MacKinnon emphasises this point in MacKinnon (1991), "From Practice to Theory, or What is a White Woman Anyway?" in *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 13:4, pp. 13-22.

84   See Schwartzman (2006), chapter 5, p. 95-109

Nussbaum's liberal feminism. Schwartzman identifies Nussbaum's methodology with a commitment to a problematic liberal abstraction, one which abstracts away from details of dominance and hierarchy[85], and with an individualistic methodology, one which functions by "paying specific attention to each and every individual."[86] In contrast, Schwartzman discusses an alternative feminist methodology which she identifies in the work of Catharine MacKinnon. This methodology rejects liberal individualism, and instead proceeds through a focus on the situation of women living under male domination. That is to say, it focuses on the moral and political harm done to a political group, women, as members of that group, rather than just a series of individual women. It is supposed that only through such a group-focus can we come to see the systematic influences on women's lives in their full, political detail; consider, here, the difference between understanding sexual harassment either as a single unpleasant event, or as a widespread practice directed specifically at women throughout public spaces in our society.

This methodology is supposed to avoid the worries some liberal feminists have expressed about a focus on groups, such as family or religious groups - that such focus will only serve to subsume the interests of individuals (particularly individual women) in such groups, and to rarefy dominant ideologies about women's place in such groups[87] – through emphasis on the idea that the situation of women is to be understood as defined and created by their oppression under patriarchy. Thus it is hoped we can talk about the differences in situation between men and women in our society, without seeking to preserve those differences, and without seeing them as unproblematic.

This methodology also rejects liberal abstraction, but replaces it with its own form of abstraction. Finally, we see Schwartzman settling on the now familiar claim that the problem is not with abstraction *per se*, but rather with certain forms of abstraction. Schwartzman wants to endorse a form of abstraction that does not leave male bias intact, or render relations of domination invisible. Her final word on abstraction reads "Because abstraction always involves the bracketing of certain features and the retention of others, this method is itself not apolitical and can never be fully impartial or neutral."[88] She sees the problem with liberal attempts at abstraction in their failure to take this point seriously, in their attempting to be politically neutral or noncommital, and so their inevitable support of a male-dominated status quo.

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85 Schwartzman (2006), p. 99.
86 Schwartzman (2006), p. 104.
87 See O'Neill (1993), p. 306 and Schwartzman (2006), p. 97-8.
88 Schwartzman (2006, p. 108-9.

Schwartzman's own preferred method, following MacKinnon, centres one particular abstract category, that of a "women's perspective"[89] or "women's point of view."[90] MacKinnon also talks about "women's consciousness, not as individual or subjective ideas, but as a collective social being,"[91] the "situation of all women,"[92] and "the notion of experience 'as a woman'."[93] This is obviously an abstract concept, an attempt to pull away from the details of the specific situations and experiences of individual women in order to characterise some more general situation or perspective. Of course this concept is similar to and related to those abstract concepts we saw in Mills' discussion of abstraction, such as patriarchy and white supremacy, but MacKinnon's concept seems to lend itself to some more specific methodologies, and also has some seriously problematic features.

For Schwartzman and MacKinnon, the idea of women's perspective, and also its content, is created through processes of consciousness raising.[94] As Schwartzman describes this, through processes of discussion "individual women become conscious of the fact that they are not the only ones who have had to endure experiences of abuse; low-paying and sexually exploitative jobs; or sexual harassment, rape, and other forms of violation. Discussing their concrete experiences with one another, women see patterns and similarities emerge; problems that formerly seemed to be rooted in women's "nature" or in their own personal failures become recognizable as products and manifestations of male dominance and female subordination."[95]

As we would expect, the creation of an abstract concept looks very different in Schwartzman's methodology than it does in O'Neill's. For Schwartzman, rather than attempting to bracket as many details as possible, holding on to only those that are absolutely necessary, it is instead important that our abstract concept be built out of all the important, though contingent, details of individual women's lives. Rather than steadfastly avoiding idealisation, Schwartzman thinks it important to give careful attention to what we include in our abstract concept, and what we leave out, and recognises these as political decisions. Of course our concept of "women's situation" *must* idealise. Not every woman has experienced abuse, sexism in the workplace, or an unequal division of labour in the home, but these must form part of our understanding of the

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89 Schwartzman (2006), p. 107.
90 MacKinnon (1989), *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge), p. 87.
91 MacKinnon (1989), p. 83-4.
92 MacKinnon (1987), *Feminism Unmodified*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge), p. 75-6.
93 MacKinnon (1991).
94 See MacKinnon (1989), chapter 5, particularly p. 87.
95 Schwartzman (2006), p. 107.

situation of women in our society.[96]

However Schwartzman notes, though underplays, a massive problem with the kind of approach she advocates. Around the mid 1980s to early 1990s, a number of feminists of colour began to specifically target the kinds of concepts favoured by Schwartzman and MacKinnon's methodology, concepts of a single, unitary, abstract women's voice, experience, situation or perspective. These feminists had observed how such concepts invariably functioned within feminist spaces to privilege the problems, experiences, and voices of the most well-off women, particularly white, middle-class women. This problem is often traced right back to Betty Friedan's pioneering feminist text *The Feminine Mystique* in which Friedan "made her plight and the plight of white women like herself [college-educated, middle or upper class] synonymous with a condition affecting all American women."[97] It has also been placed even earlier, in the work of Simone de Beauvoir.[98]

This problem is often described as gender essentialism, which Angela Harris has usefully defined as "The notion that a unitary, "essential" women's experience can be isolated and described independently of race, class, sexual orientation, and other realities of experience."[99] Harris is particularly aware of the need for some amount of abstraction in theory, acknowledging that categorization "is necessary both for human communication and political movement,"[100] but she nonetheless explicitly argues, unlike those I have discussed previously, that we need "less abstraction and not simply a different form of abstraction."[101]

Feminists have challenged both the claim lying behind gender essentialism, that there is some thing we could pick out as the experience of all women, and the effects that a methodology incorporating essentialism has, and will tend to have, on feminist theory and organisation. On the first point, Bernice Johnson Reagon suggested that "The women's movement has perpetuated a *myth* that there is some common experience that comes just cause you're women,"[102] and bell hooks writes "The idea of "common oppression" was a false and corrupt platform disguising and

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96 We could perhaps avoid this strictly counting as idealisation by speaking, for example, not just of "abuse," but rather "being subject to abuse," which more plausibly is true of all women in our society. However it's not clear what real benefit this change gets us in terms of idealisation.
97 hooks (1984), *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, (South End Press: Boston), p. 2.
98 Elizabeth Spelman devotes a chapter to this claim in Spelman (1988), *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Beacon: Boston), chapter 3..
99 Harris (1990), "Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory," *Stanford Law Review* 42:3, pp. 581-616, p. 585.
100 Harris (1990), p. 585. See also p. 586.
101 Harris (1990), p. 585. Harris is talking in the context of contemporary legal theory, but I believe her arguments would apply equally well to philosophy, or feminist methods at large.
102 Reagon (1983), "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith, (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick), p. 347.

mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality."[103] The second point involves a number of issues, all hinging on the impossibility of forming accurate general accounts of subjects like rape and sexual harassment without paying specific attention to the social position, including race, class, etc, of those under consideration.

Harris notes "The result of essentialism is to reduce the lives of people who experience multiple forms of oppression to addition problems."[104] If we believe that there is some single experience of what it is to be a woman, some general account of sexism that can be given independent of considerations of race, we are led to the view that the experiences of, say, Black women must be just *those* experiences of sexism, plus some further experiences of racism. This additive model inevitably defines the experiences of those subject to multiple forms of oppression in terms of the experiences of more dominant groups, for example defining the racism experienced by Black women in terms of the racism experienced by Black men, or the sexism they experience in terms of the sexism experienced by white women. This approach proves completely unable to adequately deal with the ways that sexism and other forms of oppression actually manifest in the lives of those at the intersection of various marginalised social positions. For example, in the case of discrimination law, Black women have been harmed by a need to prove cases of discrimination in terms of either sexual discrimination that effects all women, or racial discrimination that effects all Black people.[105] To give a more theoretical example, feminist and antiracist treatments of rape have often failed to speak to the distinct experiences of Black women who have been subject to rape under very different circumstances to white women, while also sharing with Black men a continuing history wherein laws and customs around rape have formed part of a campaign of terror against Black communities.[106]

Relating to this problem, essentialism also perpetuates focus and attention on the experiences of the most privileged women, by treating only their case as a case of unmodified sexism. Because sexism as experienced by Black women, disabled women, trans women, working class women, etc., is bound up with their other experiences of oppression, a feminist only interested in finding the truth of women's situation *per se* can be led to think that only a focus on the experiences of women unaffected by these other factors will reveal the unmodified, pure reality

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103 hooks (1984), p. 44.
104 Harris (1990), p. 588. Additionally, Spelman goes into some detail about this problem in Spelman (1988), chapter 5.
105 See Crenshaw (1989), "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," in *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989.
106 See Harris (1990), p. 598-601, and Crenshaw (1989), p. 157-160.

of women's oppression. MacKinnon seems to explicitly defend this focus in her somewhat belligerent defence of her own methodology against essentialism, as she writes "How the white woman is imagined and constructed and treated becomes a particularly sensitive indicator of the degree to which women, as such, are despised."[107] Relatedly, the myth of essentialism works to silence more subordinated groups of women by creating the impression that, because sexism is essentially always the same, any woman can speak for any other on feminist issues. In practice, of course, this will only privilege the voices most likely to be heard anyway. As Spelman puts it, "no one has ever tried to say that the situation of Hispanas in the southwestern United States is applicable to all women as women; no one has conflated their case with the case of women in general."[108]

Essentialism excludes less privileged women not only from feminist theory, but also from feminist practice and organisation, by first defining what is in some way essential to being a woman without input from the less privileged, and then justifying the continued exclusion of those same people on the grounds that they don't display the features we have taken to be essential to women. Reagon offers a detailed account of how this process has worked to marginalise Black women.[109] This same problem has recently become prominent with a different target as some feminist groups have employed essentialism in order to explicitly exclude trans women from political organisations and support mechanisms, often by reference to an essentialist notion of "female socialisation"; though, more broadly, feminist exclusions of trans women has a history dating to the 1970s.

Schwartzman underestimates the problem with essentialism when she dismisses the objections to MacKinnon's work as "objections to specific generalizations that [MacKinnon] makes, not to her desire to come up with some kind of an analysis of the situation of "women.""[110] Though some of the content of MacKinnon's theory may be targeted by specific writers, it is clear that the focus is on methodology rather than content when Harris claims that the first step to avoiding silencing the marginalised "is to give up the dream of gender essentialism,"[111] and when Reagon has offered a detailed, procedural account of how essentialism will tend to lead to exclusion.[112]

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107 MacKinnon (1991). See also Mahoney (1993), "Whiteness and Women, In Practice and Theory: A Reply to Catharine MacKinnon," in *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 217, particularly p. 245-7.
108 Spelman (1988), p. 4.
109 Reagon (1983).
110 Schwartzman (2006), p. 108.
111 Harris (1990), p. 585
112 Reagon (1983)

Consider also Marlee Kline's direct statement that "MacKinnon's work is limited in a number of important ways by her theoretical focus on subsuming all of the many forms of oppression to which women are subjected within a central explanation,"[113] or Spelman's suggestion that "Those of us who have engaged in it must give up the hunt for the generic woman – the one who is all and only woman, who by some miracle of abstraction has no particular identity in terms of race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, language, religion, nationality."[114] The methodology itself, and not just MacKinnon's conclusions, are at fault. Schwartzman's failure to spot this is somewhat ironic given that her defence of MacKinnon appears in the context of a chapter arguing that it is the methodology of liberalism, rather than its ability to accommodate the critiques of feminist theory, which is most flawed. Schwartzman fails to see how anti-essentialist arguments against MacKinnon's feminist practice are parallel to her own arguments against Nussbaum's liberal theorising; in both cases it is the methodology, not just the specific content, that is problematic.

It is worth mentioning here Mari Mikkola's defence of gender essentialism, or "gender realism," as she engages with Spelman's arguments against essentialism in some detail. Mikkola aims to defend the position, against Spelman, that there is, or may be, some feature that women have in common that makes them women.[115] Her defence focuses on the metaphysical question of whether there *may be* some common feature despite Spelman's arguments. Her explicitly methodological discussion is limited, as she shares with Schwartzman the view that it is primarily the racially-unaware contents of past attempts at essentialism, rather than these attempts per se, that have had bad political consequences.[116]

However, while Mikkola compellingly attempts to make room for the truth of some kind of metaphysical gender realism, her view of this kind of realism is ultimately supportive of my rejection of Schwartzman and MacKinnon's methodology, as she acknowledges that exactly *what* women have in common may be so complex as to be unanalysable,[117] and she suggests that the kinds of epistemic problems in discerning women's commonality, pointed out by Spelman, may give us reason to avoid making "generalizations of the kind Spelman discusses."[118] Thus, Mikkola makes room for a realism regarding gender, while leaving the critique of a methodological gender essentialism mostly untouched.

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113 Kline (1989), "Race, Racism and Feminist Legal Theory," in *Harvard Women's Law Journal* 12, p. 137-8.
114 Spelman (1988), p. 187.
115 In Mikkola (2006), "Elizabeth Spelman, Gender Realism, and Women," in *Hypatia* 21:4.
116 Mikkola (2006), p. 83-4.
117 Mikkola (2006), p. 90-3.
118 Mikkola (2006), p. 93.

Of course, the failure of essentialist methods still leaves us with the question of how to proceed in feminist methodology, or of what our attitude towards abstraction in moral philosophy should be. At this point it may be worth returning the discussion to the terms we started with, abstraction and idealisation. As O'Neill would tell us, we can see the issue with the kind of problematic essentialist feminist methodologies critiqued by those like Spelman as one of idealisation. These theories idealise by falsely ascribing to all women certain properties: specific forms of oppression they do not all suffer, experiences they do not all have, ways of being they do not all share, and so on. Furthermore this idealisation is theoretically and politically problematic, insofar as the differences that are being denied are important, insofar as it has led to a theoretically inadequate understanding of the dynamics of privilege and oppression, and insofar as engaging in this idealisation has contributed to exclusionary tendencies in feminist spaces, and to a focus on certain problems and topics within feminism that are primarily relevant to a relatively privileged minority.

However, though I agree with O'Neill's suggestion that essentialist idealisation is problematic, I would not be inclined to support her solution, a call for more pure abstraction, for the reasons discussed previously. I tend to agree with Schwartzman's contention that idealisation may be unavoidable, or at least need not always be problematic. I certainly agree with Mills' insistence that moral theory needs to deal directly with non-ideal categories, ones that let us talk about actual situations of injustice and oppression, even though it seems these categories are liable to be highly susceptible to all kinds of idealisations.

Ultimately I am sympathetic to Harris' suggestion that we engage in less abstraction, and that "we make our categories explicitly tentative, relational, and unstable".[119] Rather than *just* changing the *kinds* of abstractions we use, whether by making them more political or less idealised, I feel we need to change our attitude towards abstraction, relying on it less, being less confident in the abstractions we make, more eager to seek out and accommodate difference and detail. I see this attitude as strongly opposed to the methodology of O'Neill and Schwartzman, both of whom aim to orient their moral theorising around the use of a single central abstraction, "autonomy" for the former and "women's perspective" for the latter. Such approaches obviously display great reliance on abstraction, and a single grand abstraction at that, but also must display great confidence in the accuracy and stability of that abstraction, as it runs throughout, and determines the content of, so

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119 Harris (1990), p. 586.

much of their theory.

I believe that this idea of using abstract concepts tentatively and provisionally appears as a minor theme in much recent work on intersectionality, though I am wary of merely employing that term as a feminist buzzword, reading into it whatever I want to find.[120] Intersectionality, which has been frequently discussed and occasionally maligned in recent feminist work, is a concept with a long history in Black feminist thought, which was named and developed by Kimberle Crenshaw in the late 1980s, as a response to additive, or "single-axis," treatments of race and gender in law, theory, and politics.[121] The concept refers to the realities experienced by those situated at the intersection of more than one form of oppression, for example the intersection of race oppression and gender oppression, or the intersection of oppression on the basis of class and of sexual orientation. The idea of intersectionality stresses that such experiences cannot be understood as a simple addition of two distinct forms of oppression. Rather, the idea of intersectionality stresses that sexism, as experienced by someone also subject to racism, may be entirely different to the sexism experienced by someone who does not occupy this particular intersectional social position, and vice versa; that different forms of oppression are bound up, and compound one another, in ways that complicate any effort to separate them. It insists that we must at least potentially treat intersectional experiences of oppression as distinct from, and not reducible to or derivable from, the experiences of those who occupy different social positions.

Beyond this basic insight, exactly what intersectionality *is* is the subject of much debate. As Davis puts it, "Some suggest intersectionality is a theory, others regard it as a concept or heuristic device, and still others see it as a reading strategy for doing feminist analysis."[122] Leslie McCall identifies three different methodologies that have been called intersectionality, distinguished by their differing attitudes towards complexity and social categories such as "woman" and "Black"; roughly whether they seek to eliminate, to interrogate, or to employ such categories.[123] Anna Carastathis has distinguished between two ways of thinking about intersectionality, one that attempts to combine and merge fairly stable identity groups, and another that reconceptualises identity groups as potential coalitions, allowing us to emphasise the internal heterogenity of social groups without thereby dissolving all groups into collections of individuals with entirely

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120 Kathy Davis discusses the use of "intersectionality" as a buzzword, though ultimately doesn't object to the practice, in Davis (2008), "Intersectionality as Buzzword" *Feminist Theory* 9:1.
121 Crenshaw (1989).
122 Davis (2008), p. 68.
123 McCall (2005), "The Complexity of Intersectionality" *Signs* 30:3.

idiosyncratic experiences.[124] Distinctions have also been made between 'systemic' and 'constructionist' intersectionality[125], and weak and strong intersectionality[126].

However, this diversity of meaning is often not seen as a bad thing. As Goswami, O'Donovon & Yount write, "Generally speaking, intersectionality has been characterized as an awareness, an approach, an analysis, a tool, a strategy, a method and a theory. For some, the degree of variation and ambiguity in the term is reason enough for critique: a lack of definitional precision is equated with a lack of conceptual precision. Others suggest it is more important to understand what intersectionality does and what it enacts, as a form of praxis, than what its definition ought to be. Futhermore, there is a deliberate and necessary open-endedness to intersectionality that makes it challenging to classify."[127] Davis has discussed how the vagueness in the concept of intersectionality has helped it catch on as a feminist buzzword, but argues that it may nonetheless be a good theory, insofar as it orients us towards the important question of exclusion and difference, and "It encourages complexity, stimulates creativity, and avoids premature closure, tantalizing feminist scholars to raise new questions and explore uncharted territory."[128] Similarly, Carastathis suggests "Rather than assume that the celebratory consensus around 'intersectionality' is based on a stable, positive definition, we should view intersectionality as a provisional concept that anticipates, rather than arrives at, the normative or theoretical goals often imputed to it."[129]

Echoing this idea of provisionality in the concept of intersectionality, I believe that intersectional methodologies often encourage us to take a more provisional, modest and pluralistic attitude towards our other concepts and categories as well. Carastathis asks "What if [intersectionality] is meant to disorient 'us', disrupting our cardinal certainty, as opposed to reifying the axes that would secure it?"[130] Of course disrupting our certainty in dominant categories is not a new theme in feminism. Both O'Neill and Schwartzman would agree that establishment categories of thinking are not suitable to the task of good moral theory, and they seek to replace these categories with new abstract categories (autonomy, or women's perspective) to guide our thinking. However a thoroughly intersectional approach seems to demand some

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124 Carastathis (2013) "Identity Categories as Potential Coalitions" *Signs* 38:4, pp. 941-965.
125 See Prins (2006), "Narrative Accounts of Origins" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13:3.
126 See Waters (2014), "Past as Prologue: Intersectional Analysis from the Nineteenth Century to the Twenty-First" in Goswami, O'Donovan & Yount (2014)
127 Goswami, O'Donovon & Yount (2014), Introduction, p. 1-2.
128 Davis (2008), p. 79. This issue of premature closure will also come up in chapter 5 of this these, when I talk about Haraway's idea of situated knowledge.
129 Catastathis (2014), "Reinvigorating Intersectionality as a Provisional Concept," in Goswami, O'Donovan & Yount (2014), p. 59-70.
130 Carastathis (2014), p. 62.

critical attention to categories themselves, rather than just the provision of new categories. Cho, Crenshaw & McCall characterise as central to intersectional analysis a way of "conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power."[131] Carastathis suggests that approaches like O'Neill's and Schwartzman's, even if they were to display some weak intersectionality in the form of attention to those suffering multiple axes of oppression,[132] would "overlook entirely [intersectionality's] critical (dis)orientation towards categories, and continue[...] to deploy them as if they were unproblematic."[133] On the contrary, she urges "we might question the epistemic ideal of arrival at an empirically based conclusive account of 'social totality',"[134] and she emphasises the provisional nature of any knowledge about complex systems.

A related view of intersectionality appears in Kristie Dotson's discussion of intersectionality's "demand for open-ended consolidation," which here "refers to the act of relating seemingly unrelated bits of information to construct richer, fuller narratives of our social worlds."[135] In the name of intersectionality, Dotson advocates a practice of seeking new and varied information, and resisting uncritical judgements of what kind of detail may be relevant, "for the purpose of rendering visible experiences that have been theoretically erased by prevailing practices of knowledge production concerning oppression."[136] Such an approach would resist an overly confident reliance on single grand categories or concepts. Though Dotson notes the importance of systems-based theories, which work in terms of neat, stable concepts of oppression, she argues that these theories alone "fail[...] miserably to track the range of jeopardization one faces given different readable social identities."[137] They are inadequate to deal with the reality of oppression in all its detail, and this inadequacy has serious theoretical and political consequences.

In the picture I am trying to present, intersectionality as a method resists a steadfast or uncritical reliance on any generalisations of the kind Schwartzman and MacKinnon employ. Though such abstractions may be employed, an intersectional method demands we never be too

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131 Cho, Crenshaw & McCall (2013) "Towards a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis", *Signs* 38:4, p. 795. They may be thinking here primarily of social categories such as "woman" and "Black," but it seems clear how this attitude should stretch further to other categories and concepts, especially when, as in the work of feminists such as Schwartzman, our moral insights are supposed to be reached through the employment of those social categories.

132 As, indeed, O'Neill does in her focus on women in poor economies, in O'Neill (1993).

133 Carastathis (2014), p. 65.

134 Carastathis (2014), p. 65.

135 Dotson (2014), "Making Sense: The Multistability of Oppression and the Importance of Intersectionality" in Goswami, O'Donovan & Yount (2014), p. 43.

136 Dotson (2014), p. 44.

137 Doston (2014), p. 50.

confident of them, and always be prepared to see how such abstractions may fall apart when more detailed, intersectional concerns are considered. It is not about denying all use of general terms like "women," or "white women," or "disabled working-class women,"[138] but rather about taking seriously the idea that anything we say about such generalities is answerable to further, perhaps unexpected details, and refusing to treat these details as exceptional, marginal, or antithetical to the overall political project.[139] In this way, though it makes room for abstraction, it does demand less, rather than just a different kind of, abstraction. It demands less confidence in our abstractions, less reliance on our most abstract categories, more willingness and drive to seek and seriously accommodate difference and detail.

ABSTRACTION AND THE MORALITY OF MISGENDERING

To conclude this chapter, I would like to look at abstraction through the examination of a particular moral issue. I've decided to look at the issue of misgendering. For my purposes here, to misgender someone is to refer to them with language that inaccurately describes their gender; for example to refer to a woman with pronouns such as "he," to describe a man as "female" or as "my daughter," or to talk about someone of non-binary gender with inappropriately gendered terms.[140] Any of us could acknowledge that misgendering can be a harmful act. For example, we know that a young boy may attempt to insult another by calling him a girl, and feminist philosophers have discussed the way that women's behaviour can be policed through withdrawal of recognition of their gender;[141] in both of these cases, a cultural construction of, and disdain for, the feminine is at work.[142] However, most people are unlikely to focus on misgendering as a particularly pressing or interesting moral issue, as their encounters with it are likely to be few, and relatively non-serious. Furthermore, if we start our moral reasoning from a highly abstract position, putting aside such

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138 Crenshaw specifically rejects versions of antiessentialism which aim to reject any use of social categories such as "Blacks" or "women." See Crenshaw (1991), "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" *Stanford Law Review* 43:6, p. 1296.

139 See Crenshaw (1991), p. 1253-1265, for a discussion of how both feminist and antiracist activists came to see any publicity of details relating to rates of domestic violence in black communities to be antithetical to antiracist and feminist political goals.

140 One could certainly have a more expansive account of misgendering that included behaviours as well as language, but though some of what I say here would be relevant to such misgendering, it would raise additional complications I will leave aside; for a useful discussion of this in relation to sexual harrassment, see Millbank (2011), "The Gender Ternary: Understanding Transmisogyny," published on *A Radical TransFeminist*, December 12th, 2011, http://radtransfem.wordpress.com/2011/12/12/genderternary-transmisogyny/. Similarly I will not worry about the use of pronouns such as "it," which raises issues of dehumanisation in addition to misgendering.

141 For example, Claudia Card mentions that patriarchy defines a lesbian as a "not-woman", in Card (1998), "Radicalesbianfeminist Theory," *Hypatia* 13:1, pp.206-213, p. 209

142 See Serano (2007), *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Seal Press: Berkeley), in particular chapter 19.

contingent details as gender - attending only to our essential nature as, for example, finite, interdependent, interconnected agents – it looks like the distinct moral issues regarding misgendering will be unable to come into focus as all. Misgendering is certainly not an issue, like death, deprivation and domination, that is liable to effect almost any of us because of the very kinds of creatures that we are. In fact, it is likely to be a serious concern only for a relatively small number of us.

Of course, among the people for whom misgendering can be a severely important moral issue are trans people, such as myself.[143] Some trans people are misgendered on a daily basis, in perhaps all their interactions with other people, or all but those with their closest friends. Many trans people have, in the past, gone through a period where this was the case, and such experiences may have left deep scars on us. Some continue to be regularly misgendered by people they love, family and friends. For this particular class of people, at certain times in their life, misgendering *can* come to be the most pressing, and most oppressive moral challenge they face in day-to-day life.

Unsurprisingly, for such a particular moral issue that so distinctly affects such a particular group of people, even if a purely abstract approach to moral reasoning were able to get the issue into focus, it would be almost useless for providing us with a deep moral understanding and evaluation of what it means for a *trans* person to be misgendered. That is not to say a purely abstract moral account of misgendering would be impossible; one could perhaps see misgendering as an instance of a more general moral harm such as a failure of recognition. But in abstracting away from the details and experiences of trans lives, we would lose sight of any of the material necessary for a deep and interesting understanding of the moral issues as they apply to trans people. In trying to craft a purely abstract account of the moral harm, one that in principle could apply as well to the misgendering of cis people as to the misgendering of trans people, we are doomed to create an analysis that is of little interest to either; an analysis that cis people will disregard as of marginal interest, and that trans people will see as totally failing to make sense of our experiences, and the harm that we can immediately feel. In practice, such an analysis would be not just uninteresting, but also harmful, insofar as it would diminish the apparent severity of the moral issue by casting it only in terms amenable to cis audiences.[144] This harm is not just

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143 I do not want to suggest that trans people are the *only* people significantly affected by misgendering, but they will be my focus in the following.

144 If we must analogise, consider a moral account of sexual harassment which refused to go beyond any analysis of that which may also affect men.

theoretical, but actually manifests in the all too common response, from cis folk who are challenged about acts of misgendering, that "they, personally, would not take such offence if they had been misgendered."[145]

So, in developing a complete understanding of the moral issues surrounding misgendering we need to attend, from the start, to the experiences of the trans people who are confronted by it. For this reason, and because trans folk have often been denied the space in mainstream academic spaces to articulate their own experiences – an issue of epistemic injustice – I will be occasionally be referring to passages from personal and critical blog posts written by trans people. We can start with the immediate affective impact of misgendering; misgendering can cause a huge deal of psychological pain, both immediate and long-term. It often brings up anxiety, anger, misery, self-consciousness, self-hatred, and dysphoria. It makes us feel fundamentally unseen, destroying our social well-being. It can trigger us, drawing our attention to unpleasant realities and painful histories that we might otherwise be able to keep out of mind. As many trans people have made a firm and difficult decision to change the way they are perceived, to distance themselves from an old projected false-self, and to face great personal cost in the struggle to develop and manifest a genuine personal identity, being misgendered can sometimes shake our confidence in that project, bringing us to feelings of despair and hopelessness. Similarly, "we're not ignorant of the consequences of being trans... Our culture fears and hates us, openly and actively."[146] Even for those of us who can avoid feelings of shame and internalised transphobia, to jarringly have the fact that we are trans brought to active attention like this can remind us of how the world sees us, with the pain and fear that may accompany that.

In addition to (and bound up with) the immediate affective impact, there is the impact of repeated misgendering. Many trans people live a life in which misgendering is, or at some time has been, a frequent occurrence. Even if it is a one-off offence from some particular person, it is likely to have happened many times before, and may happen again many times in the future, for every trans person who is misgendered. The pain caused by misgendering goes beyond the individual event; frequent misgendering creates fear and anxiety over the possibility that it may occur at any time, often without warning. This can lead to life-disabling avoidance strategies; avoiding our friends from anxiety about dealing with them, avoiding work because of some

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145 Char C (2011), "Why Misgendering is Bad," published on *Tranarchism*, April 26, 2011, http://tranarchism.com/2011/04/26/guest-post-why-misgendering-is-bad. Note also that this kind of response can be a form of gaslighting.
146 Char C (2011)

particularly offensive co-worker, or even avoiding being in public from fear of painful or even violent interactions with strangers.[147] Misgendering destroys relationships, both personal and professional, causing massive systematic harm to trans individuals. It can also lead trans women to attempt to avoid these harmful effects by adopting more stereotypically feminine behaviour; in this way, "the punishment of misgendering" may be employed as a violent tool by which cispatriarchy enforces trans womens' conformity with oppressive gender norms.[148] In addition, it forces us to face the difficult question of how to deal with misgendering, given its frequency. Should I speak up, thus running the risk of seeming difficult, overly sensitive, or aggressive, and "making [myself] feel like an outsider every single time it happens"?[149] Or should I let it pass, giving witnesses the impression that misgendering me and others is okay, opening myself up for future offences, and making myself feel cowardly and self-denying? Obviously, this is a double-bind; neither option is appealing.

Abstracting away from immediate affective impacts, but maintaining a focus on trans people's experiences, we should also consider what it *means* to a trans person to be misgendered. Though to misgender a trans person certainly is an infringement of their autonomy, their freedom to create their own life and identity, it is also crucially important to note that misgendering is also *inaccurate*, it *falsely* ascribes an incorrect social category. To hold an understanding of misgendering *entirely* rooted in the idea of autonomy risks missing this fact, risks portraying trans people's genders as put on, respected as a decision or act of self-creation, rather than respected as the truth of our social reality, as who we genuinely are.[150] Similarly, acts of misgendering work to reinforce, in the minds of the speakers, witnesses, and trans people themselves, a cisnormative standard, one which casts the gender of trans people as less genuine than the gender of cis people. This is a norm that destroys the lives of trans people, often fatally. "Our genders and identities are constantly up for debate and misgendering a trans* person is a reminder of that. Misgendering us is a reminder

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147 See Ellis, McNeil & Bailey (2014), "Gender, Stage of Transition and Situational Avoidance: A UK study of trans people's experiences," *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 29:3.

148 See see Millbank (2012), "Sex Educations: Gendering and Regendering Women," published on *A Radical TransFeminist*, February 3rd, 2012, http://radtransfem.wordpress.com/2012/02/03/sex-educations-gendering-and-regendering-women/.

149 Kopas (2014), "Here is what it's like to be a trans woman," published on *A Dire Faun*, June 15, 2014, http://pinebark.tumblr.com/post/88906170162/here-is-what-its-like-to-be-a-trans-woman-you

150 Note this view may be in conflict with Talia Bettcher's plausible suggestion that "When someone engages in the political act of category-claiming, the question whether she made a true statement isn't germane." However, she would agree that a trans person's assertion of their gender concerns "who one is, really," and that such claims *can* be true or false, depending on the individual's self-understanding. Bettcher (2009), "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority," in *You've Changed: Sex Reassignment and Personal Identity*, ed. Laurie Shrage (Oxford University Press: Oxford), p. 110-2. Note also, in this paper Bettcher does link misgendering to violations of autonomy.

that our identities are considered fragile, something to be bent and broken to the will of the cis people who wish to abuse us."[151] It is also a norm that has often been disastrously internalised by trans people, in ways analogous to internalised sexism and racism, and that some trans people struggle with long after transition. Further, it is important to note that this cisnormativity can function even in contexts in which the very idea of gender is in question: those who assert the artificiality or socially constructed nature of gender may nonetheless reinforce cisnormativity by misgendering trans folks while correctly gendering cis people. This demonstrates an attitude wherein even if all genders are, to some extent, not genuine, nonetheless trans people's genders are somehow seen as even *less* genuine than those of cis people.

Again we can abstract away from the impact of misgendering on individuals, and come to see how misgendering someone is not just harmful to a single victim, but can also be an attack on an entire community. In reinforcing a cisnormative standard, one does not just deny the identity of a single person, but rather challenges the identity of all trans people. In particular, acts of misgendering performed out of frustration or anger communicate to all trans people experiencing or witnessing them 'my respect for your identity is contingent on you behaving the way I wish.' Our genders can be held hostage in ways that the genders of cis people never will be, and we are all too aware of the damage this conditionality does to our identity even when we feel personally safe from particular acts of misgendering. And the community impact of misgendering is not limited to denial of our identity: "It is not uncommon in media to degender and misgender openly trans* people, especially when attempting to portray them in a negative light. This intentional misgendering serves to show trans* people in the light of liars and deceivers; as mentally ill people who are not to be trusted. It is meant to attack the person on a fundamental level that is still very acceptable in today's society."[152]

Now I hope to have provided an analysis of the harm of misgendering on a number of levels of abstraction, considering both individuals and communities, and both personal experiences and abstract theories of cisnormativity. What I would *not* now want to do is proceed to a higher level of abstraction by abstracting away from victims' trans status, and considering the impact of misgendering on people in general. I would argue that such a move could add nothing to our analysis. Whatever harm we may understand misgendering to entail when separated from

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151 Clark (2014), "Misgendering is Violence," published on *Gender Terror*, January 30, 2014, http://genderterror.com/2014/01/30/misgendering-is-violence/
152 Clark (2014).

the particular experiences and interests discussed above, that harm would seem to be very different, or at least much less severe, than the harm that trans people in particular face. Importantly, it is implausible that any analysis on such a level of abstraction could somehow *include* or *generate* an analysis of the harm discussed in terms of trans people in particular.

Still, though I have offered some analysis of the harm of misgendering, we must recall our earlier discussion of intersectionality. It would be overly confident for me to claim this as anything like *the* analysis of misgendering. I write as a relatively privileged trans woman, in particular one who is white and middle class. Much of what I wrote may not apply, or may need to be modified, for those occupying other social positions. For example, I wrote that for trans people "misgendering *can* come to be the most pressing, and most oppressive moral challenge they face in day-to-day life." Though I suspect there are few trans people for whom misgendering is never an issue, nonetheless what I have written here comes from the standpoint of someone whose particular privileges tend to shield her from harms such as incarceration, homelessness, poverty and physical violence, all of which are serious issues in trans and queer communities, affecting particularly trans women of colour, and too often ignored or even co-opted by the more privileged members of these communities. Similarly, much of my analysis comes from the perspectives of binary trans folks. It's important to note that experiences of misgendering can be very different for those outside the gender binary, who may only very rarely be correctly gendered, and may more frequently have their gender disregarded even by other queer and trans people.[153]

So, to sum up my conclusions on abstraction and idealisation from this chapter, I would ultimately argue that moral philosophy needs less abstraction, rather than *just* a different kind of abstraction. I agree with Mills that it is vitally important that we do not abstract away from the social realities of oppression, and further argue that attending to the specific details of moral life, in all their intersectional complexity, is important. I have argued that our abstractions should be built from, and answerable to these complexities, and suggested that this may require a different way of treating abstract concepts, as provisional and unstable. On the issue of idealisation, I have agreed with Schwartzman that, while idealisation can be problematic, it is also probably unavoidable when we abstract, and so we must pay careful attention to the political implications and assumptions contained in our idealisations.

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153 C.N. Lester makes this point in Lester (2013), "On misgendering and authenticity," published on *A Gentleman and a Scholar*, September 26, 2013, http://cnlester.wordpress.com/2013/09/26/on-misgendering-and-authenticity/

Chapter 5 - Epistemology, Ignorance and Thought Experiments

In this chapter, I employ some insights from epistemologies developed by feminist and anti-racist theorists in order to critique a fairly dominant methodological tendency in moral philosophy, the tendency to attempt to understand or evaluate moral situations and actions primarily through what might be called universalistic first-personal methods. By this I mean methods that essentially rely only on the judgements or understandings that a single individual, the lone philosopher, can bring to bear under their own steam, as it were, rather than employing any engagement with the wider world, other perspectives, or even private understandings that the philosopher knows to be not widely shared.

A dominant example of such methods, and one which I will discuss in some depth, is the use of thought experiments. Though the construction of such experiments may be informed by external knowledge of moral situations, though they will often be presented to us by some other philosopher, and though they may explicitly attempt to form an analogy between a hypothetical situation and a real-life case, nonetheless I see thought experiments as essentially first-personal, insofar as they are designed to function by stripping away any need for us to deal with resources beyond the thought experimental set-up and our own judgement. They allow a philosopher to examine only this closely described hypothetical case, a case which that philosopher could have, in principle if not in practice, come up with purely on their own, and then, relying on no resources beyond their personal judgement and intuition, deliver a verdict which is supposed to reveal something deep about the moral truth. It is a methodology perfectly crafted to be such that any philosopher could, in principle, employ it on their own. It is also a methodology that must assume, if it is to get at a singular moral truth when employed by any philosopher, that all thinkers are essentially the same in their judgements, or that the methodology itself can strip away their relevant differences. The methodology is first-personal, insofar as it relies only on the private resources of the philosopher, but universalistic, insofar as it assumes that those private resources are common to all thinkers.

We can see how such methodological tendencies may be embedded in the decision procedures of some moral theories. For example, take a simplified reading of how to employ the first formulation of Kant's categorical imperative: in performing an action, we formulate a maxim

that can describe our action. This is presumably a matter of understanding the action on its own terms, in some sense, and in terms of our motivations. We then check whether this maxim can be universalised without contradiction, and whether we can will the universalisation of the maxim. Again this seems to be a purely internal rational process, one that needs no input from others, or the real world. The categorical imperative was crafted as a procedure that any agent can reliably perform on their own. Kant is explicit that "what *duty* is, is plain of itself to everyone,"[1] and that a hypothetical universalisation test for morality can be performed without experience "with regard to the course of the world."[2] Of course, this is not to say that all Kantian moral understanding must display this methodological tendency; for example, once we have discovered that we have an imperfect duty to benefit others, we may see that we need to understand others and their situations in order to discharge this duty. Nonetheless, on this reading, a strong streak of first-personal authority lies at the heart of Kant's system, certainly in his first formulation of the categorical imperative. The need for outside-world input seems to be purposefully put to the side.

It's worth noting here that when I speak of first-personal methods, this is not to be equated with what Susan J. Brison calls speaking in a "personal voice." As she notes, many philosophers have written in the first-person singular, but did so "as part of an argumentative strategy to be employed by any reader to establish, ultimately, the same universal truths."[3] Speaking in a personal voice is the deeply opposed strategy of bringing to bear, in our philosophical practice, personal experiences and situated knowledge, knowledge that we *know* not to be shared by all, or perhaps any other philosophers, in order to deepen our understanding of the subject at hand. Though such personal writing will often be grammatically first-personal, it engages with more than just the private resources of a singular (presumed to be universal) mind, including as well the philosopher's experiences with the outside, physical and social world, and often also the experiences of other, similarly situated subjects. As Brison puts it, "Feminists and trauma theorists writing of their own experiences do not claim, as did Descartes, that any rational person carrying out the same line of abstract reasoning will reach the same impersonal conclusions. Rather, we are suggesting that anyone in these particular circumstances, with this kind of socialization, with these

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1   Kant (2015), *Critique of Practical Reason: Revised Edition*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge), 5:36.

2   Kant (2012), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor & Jens Timmermann (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge), 4:403.

3   Brison (2002), *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton), p. 24. The rest of her chapter 2, "On the Personal as Political," is deeply relevant to this point.

options and limitations may (*may*, not must) view the world in this way."[4]

The appropriateness of the universalistic first-personal methodological tendency is challenged by epistemologies that have been developed in recent feminist and critical race philosophy. In particular, I want to look at standpoint epistemology, and the discussion surrounding epistemologies of ignorance. These closely related areas of philosophical interest both develop the idea that there is something about the standpoint or psychology of those occupying certain positions in society – in particular, socially privileged positions – which will tend to make it harder for them to get at important truths, including moral truths, about their own world. Though these problems of ignorance, and my discussion, will certainly not be limited to the kinds of universalistic first-personal methods I have introduced above, these epistemologies seem to present a particularly strong challenge to any philosophical methods that do not attempt to take a socially privileged thinker beyond their own experiences and judgements.

LIBERAL EPISTEMOLOGY AND STANDPOINT EPISTEMOLOGY

Before looking at standpoint epistemology, it will help to briefly establish some understanding of the epistemological picture that feminist standpoint epistemologists have been reacting against. Allison Jaggar identies a tradition of Cartesian epistemology which has been "associated historically and conceptually with liberalism."[5] It is perhaps the dominant tradition of epistemology in philosophy, particularly in the analytic tradition, and encompasses both rationalist and empiricist tendencies. It rests on a radically individualistic conception of human nature, and "views the attainment of knowledge as a project for each individual on her or his own" and "as essentially a solitary occupation that has no necessary social preconditions."[6] In this, we can clearly see how an epistemological preference for what I've called first-personal methods would dominate.

This liberal epistemology aims for objectivity, and sees this objectivity as provided by an absence of bias. We can see how this follows from its radical individualism; if all thinkers are to individually ideally arrive at the same set of conclusions, the (single) truth, it must be supposed that this truth can be reached despite differences in the particular positions of individual thinkers. Thus these differences, such as the distinct experiences, emotions, and interests that derive from particular contingent social positions, are cast only as something to be overcome or put aside, in

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4   Brison (2002), p. 29.
5   Jaggar (1983), *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, (The Harvester Press: Sussex), p. 355.
6   Jaggar (1983), p. 355.

the quest for a kind of impartiality that allows thinkers to see the truth unhindered. And so "the good moral or political philosopher of the contemporary liberal tradition [... is] able to detach herself or himself from such 'contingent' properties as race, class or sex."[7]

This is what we might call a "view from nowhere" epistemology, one that requires thinkers to approximate the idealised epistemological position of the hypothetical thinker who has no position, no attachments or particularities. We can see this vision of epistemology in Nagel's taking it to be definitional that "to reason is to think systematically in ways that anyone looking over my shoulder ought to be able to recognise as correct."[8] It manifests also in Sidgwick's requirement to see goodness "from the point of view of the Universe,"[9] and in Rawls' requirement that thinkers in the original position are ignorant of the particularities of their social position.[10] It is a pervasive view in moral, philosophical and political thought, shared even by many feminists, those who identify the problem with traditional, sexist theorising and morality as simply a problem of male bias, a problem of male thinkers failing to live up to the standards of liberal epistemology; "liberal feminists assume that the validity of their theory will be evident to all who set aside their own special interests."[11] It is also a powerfully influential way of thinking outside of philosophical contexts, manifest whenever it is suggested that someone cannot understand or have a valid view of some injustice because they are 'too close to it.' For a particularly striking example, consider this transaction between Malcolm X and a journalist, Jim Hurlbut, broadcast on U.S. television in 1963:

> **Jim Hurlbut:** You were born in Omaha, is that right?
> **Malcolm X:** Yes sir.
> **Hurlbut:** And your family left Omaha when you were, what? One year old?
> **Malcolm X**: I imagine about a year old.
> **Hurlbut:** Now, why did they leave Omaha?
> **Malcolm X**: Well, to my understanding… the Ku Klux Klan burned down one of their homes in Omaha.
> **Hurlbut:** This made your family feel very unhappy I'm sure?
> **Malcolm X**: Well insecure if not unhappy.
> **Hurlbut:** So you must have a somewhat prejudiced point of view — a personally prejudiced point of view. In other words, you cannot look at this in a broad, academic sort of way, really, can you?
> **Malcolm X**: I think that's incorrect, because despite the fact that that happened in Omaha and then when moved to Lansing, Michigan our home was burned down again — in fact, my father was killed by the Ku Klux Klan, and despite all of that, no one was more thoroughly integrated with whites than I. No one has lived more

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7   Jaggar (1983), p. 357.
8   Nagel (1997), *The Last Word* (Oxford University Press: Oxford), p. 5.
9   Sidgwick (1930), p. 382
10   Rawls (1971), *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge), p. 260-263.
11   Jaggar (1983), p. 357-8.

so in the society of whites than I.[12]

In this transaction, Hurlbut expresses the view that because of Malcolm X's personal involvement with racism, his involvement as one who has suffered egregious racism, and his resulting emotional response (being "very unhappy"), he is therefore put in an epistemically *worse* position with regard to understanding it. His experiences, his emotions and his particular point of view – that of a Black man in a racist society – are cast as something that gets in the way of the kind of detachment and abstraction – taking a "broad, academic" view – that is required by the kind of liberal epistemology discussed above. As we see in this case, this is an epistemology that is perfectly formed to cast the most socially privileged as the only people that can truly understand society, and to discount the experiences and theories of those who suffer marginalisation and systematic harm at the hands of that society; that is, so long as the epistemology is accompanied by certain assumptions about socially privileged individuals being above, or uninvolved in the oppressions they benefit from. We can see liberal feminist epistemologies as challenging these assumptions - insisting that men are involve, and prone to a male bias - while leaving the basic epistemological structure intact. However, more radical feminist epistemologies challenge that basic structure, and reject the idea that a situated standpoint, a view from somewhere, must be an epistemic burden.

One such feminist epistemology is standpoint epistemology, a view developed by Sandra Harding and Nancy Hartsock, among others. Standpoint epistemology has its origins in the Marxist position that prevailing worldviews tend to reflect the interests and values of dominant classes, and that the proletariat are, because of their social marginality, along with their central position in structures of capitalist production, best placed to understand capitalism, and so possess a certain kind of epistemic privilege.[13] Standpoint epistemologists have attempted to develop these views, separating the idea of centrality from the justification of epistemic privilege, and broadening the view to attribute epistemic privilege to other socially marginalised groups. In particular, seeing that patriarchal power structures in our society will tend to distort the processes and results of research, feminist standpoint epistemologists have argued for variations on the

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12   This interview can be found at Godvia (2012), "Malcolm X: Inquisition Chicago's City Desk," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yq-Q-omi3U8, accessed 20th May 2015.

13   See Bar On (1993) "Marginality and Epistemic Privilege," in *Feminist Epistemologies*, eds. Alcoff and Potter (Routledge: London), p. 86. Harding has more recently pointed out that, aside from this academic history, something like the claims of standpoint theory have arisen again and again in the context of new social justice movements, see Harding (2015), "After Mr. Nowhere: What Kind of Proper Self for a Scientist," *Feminist Philosophical Quarterly* 1:1, Article 2, p. 5.

claim that "a primary condition for the adequacy of a feminist theory, indeed for the adequacy of any theory, is that it should represent the world from the standpoint of women."[14] As Harding points out, these theories have been presented by various authors "as a philosophy of both natural and social sciences, an epistemology, a methodology... and a political strategy,"[15] but my focus here will be on standpoint theory as a methodology, and an epistemology.

What exactly is the standpoint of women? Women's standpoint is something we develop by, first, looking at women's lives and listening to women's voices. "The distinctive social experience of women generates insights that are incompatible with men's interpretations of reality and these insights provide clues to how reality might be interpreted from the standpoint of women. The validity of these insights, however, must be tested in political struggle and developed into a systematic representation of reality that is not distorted in ways that promote the interests of men above those of women."[16]

This standpoint is not meant to be simply a cluster of experiences, or everything that women might say. After all, Harding points out, women say all kinds of thing that may be incoherent, misleading, based on incomplete understandings, sexist, racist or heterosexist.[17] Women are, like men, prone to believing dominant world views, buying into prevailing ideology, even to their own detriment. So, "it is not the experience or the speech [of women] that provides the grounds for feminist claims; it is rather the subsequently articulated observations of and theory about the rest of nature and social relations – observations and theory that start out from, that look at the world from the perspective of, women's lives."[18] Standpoint epistemologists, then, make a distinction between 'women's/feminist standpoint' and 'women's perspective.' A standpoint is *engaged*, rather than a matter of simply looking at the world in a disinterested way.[19] It is also an achievement, theoretically, politically, and, as I will discuss in the next chapter, personally. A standpoint is "achieved rather than obvious, a mediated rather than immediate understanding."[20] Similarly, women's standpoint is created through political struggle: "we can come to understand hidden aspects of social relations between the genders and the institutions that support these

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14 Jaggar (1983), p. 370. Jaggar refers to those advocating feminist standpoint epistemologies as "socialist feminists," to be contrasted (though not always sharply) with liberal, Marxist, and radical feminists.
15 Harding (2004) "Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*, ed. Harding, (Routledge: London), p. 2.
16 Jaggar (1983), p. 371.
17 Harding (1991), *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (Open University Press: Milton Keynes), p. 123.
18 Harding (1991), p. 124.
19 Hartsock (1983), "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *Discovering Reality,* eds. Harding and Hintikka (D. Reidel Publishing Company: London), p. 285.
20 Hartsock (1983), p. 288.

relations only through struggles to change them [...] In a socially stratified society the objectivity of the results of research is increased by political activism by and on behalf of oppressed, exploited, and dominated groups."[21] Political struggle is a necessary part of standpoint methodologies insofar as it helps the marginalised achieve the means to produce knowledge (training, jobs, funding, publication), insofar as it creates the collective group consciousness that feminist researchers employ, and insofar as "political struggle itself produced insight."[22] Hartsock also claims that "a standpoint by definition carries a liberatory potential,"[23] and for this reason speaks only of a 'feminist standpoint' rather than 'women's standpoint.'

Different feminist standpoint theorists have offered different justifications for why women's lives provide an epistemically privileged vantage point; though these are related and often compatible justifications. Hartsock uses psychoanalysis to justify this position, claiming that "girls, because of female parenting, are less differentiated from others than boys, more continuous with and related to the external object world."[24] She claims this leads women to develop the beginnings of a feminist standpoint, where boys learn to identify with an abstract masculinity, and that both tendencies are reinforced by the sexual division of labour. Jaggar offers a justification for the epistemic privilege of the oppressed in terms of interests and suffering:

> Because their class position insulates them from the suffering of the oppressed, many members of the ruling class are likely to be convinced by their own ideology; either they fail to perceive the suffering of the oppressed or they believe that it is freely chosen, deserved or inevitable. They experience the current organization of society as basically satisfactory and so they accept the interpretation of reality that justifies that system of organization. They encounter little in their daily lives that conflicts with that interpretation. Oppressed groups, by contrast, suffer directly from the system that oppresses them. Sometimes the ruling ideology succeeds in duping them into a partial denial of their pain or into accepting it temporarily but the pervasiveness, intensity and relentlessness of their suffering constantly push oppressed groups towards a realization that something is wrong with the prevailing social order. Their pain provides them with a motivation for finding out what is wrong, for criticizing accepted interpretations of reality and for developing new and less distorted ways of understanding the world. These new systems of conceptualization will reflect the interests and values of the oppressed groups and so constitute a representation of reality from an alternative to the

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21 Harding (1991), p. 127.
22 Harding (2004) p. 6.
23 Hartsock (1983), p. 289.
24 Hartsock (1983), p. 295. I will later discuss idealisation in Hartsock's theory.

dominant standpoint.[25]

Sandra Harding offers eight different grounds for the claim that women's standpoint provides less partial and distorted knowledge.[26] These grounds are based on the ways that women are alienated from social power, thus providing a resistant, rarely-heard, outsider's voice.[27] She also, like Jaggar, notes the importance of interests, observing that women have "fewer interests in ignorance about the social order and fewer reasons to invest in maintaining or justifying the status quo than do dominant groups."[28] Additionally, like Hartsock, she notes the importance of the sexual division of labour, suggesting that the kind of work women are expected to do, taking care of bodies and physical spaces, keeps them connected to realities of the world that are made invisible to men, who are 'freed' for abstract thought. She argues that the social role of men in ruling groups "shapes these men's concepts of the world into those appropriate for administrative work"[29] which, as Dorothy Smith puts it, "transform[s] subjects into the objects of study [and makes] use of conceptual devices for eliminating the active presence of subjects.[30]" Such ways of thinking "sustain an ethos of dominance and mastery, where a dislocated knower-as-spectator seeks to predict, manipulate, and control the behavior of the material world and of other "less enlightened" people."[31]

Because women engage with parts of the world that men tend to be disconnected from, but are also forced to live in the world created and structured by men, their standpoint includes more than can be seen from the position of men. "Whereas the condition of the oppressed groups is visible only dimly to the ruling class, the oppressed are able to see more clearly the ruled as well as the rulers and the relation between them. Thus, the standpoint of the oppressed includes and is able to explain the standpoint of the ruling class."[32] Mills expresses a similar thought in relation to race: "Often for their very survival, blacks have been forced to become lay anthropologists, studying the strange culture, customs, and mind-set of the "white tribe" that has such frightening

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25 Jaggar (1983), p. 370.
26 Harding (1991), p. 121-133.
27 See also Collins (1986) "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," *Social Problems* 33:6, pp. S14-S32.
28 Harding (1991), p. 126.
29 Harding (1991), p. 128-9.
30 Smith (1988), *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Open University Press: Milton Keynes), p.105. See also p. 108-9.
31 Code (2006), *Ecological Thinking,* (Oxford University Press: New York), p. 8.
32 Jaggar (1983), p. 371. Of course, by Hartsock's definition, the ruling class' viewpoint could not count as a standpoint.

power over them, that in certain times periods can even determine their life or death on a whim."[33]

It's worth looking at how this notion of epistemic privilege is supposed to operate. Exactly what domains of knowledge are a feminist standpoint supposed to be epistemically privileged to reveal? Most of the justifications offered above suggest that a feminist standpoint will be most helpful when thinking about issues relating to our male dominated society, or about domains from which men are alienated. This scope is suggested by Harding, as when she writes "Starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order."[34] However a broader scope is also sometimes suggested, such as in the claim that "all knowledge attempts are socially situated and that some of these objective social locations are better than others as starting points for knowledge projects."[35] In characterising standpoint epistemologies against the weaker view of "general situatedness as knowers,"[36] Linda Alcoff suggests that "what follows most significantly from Harding's approach is that epistemic advantages and disadvantages accrue to social and group identities per se rather than identities only in relation to a given context of inquiry [...] the pattern of epistemic positionality created by some identities has the potential for relevance in broad domains of inquiry, perhaps in any inquiry."[37]

The justification for this broader scope can be seen when we look more broadly at Harding's critique of conventional scientific practice. In particular, factors which make women's lives a privileged starting point for research into the social order will clearly also be relevant for research into broader scientific topics once we understand that the sciences, their goals, methods and results – including those of the natural sciences - can themselves be understood to be part of that social order, rather than somehow separated from society. Harding argues, in some depth, that "the natural sciences should be considered to be embedded in the social sciences because everything scientists do or think is part of the social world."[38] She notes that "culturewide (or nearly culturewide) beliefs function as evidence at every stage in scientific inquiry: in the selection

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33 Mills (2007), p. 17-8. See also Narayan (2004), "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*, ed. Harding, (Routledge: London), p. 213-224, which emphasises that other responses are available to those forced to live in two worlds, such as dichotomizing their lives, or attempting to utterly reject the practices of the non-dominant group.
34 Harding (1993) "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is "Strong Objectivity"?" in *Feminist Epistemologies,* eds. Alcoff and Potter (Routledge: London), p. 56.
35 Harding (1993), p. 56.
36 Alcoff (2007), "Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types" in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, eds. Sullivan and Tuana (State University of New York Press: Albany), p. 40.
37 Alcoff (2007), p. 47.
38 Harding (1991), p. 99, and more generally chapter 4.

of problems, the formation of hypotheses, the design of research (including the organization of research communities), the collection of data, the interpretation and sorting of data, decisions about when to stop research, the way results of research are reported, and so on."[39] So here we see that the methodological implications of Harding's standpoint theory are meant to be quite broad, touching on many areas of scientific and academic practice. For Harding, starting thought from women's lives is not merely a matter of, once deciding on a research project, focusing on the lives of women in our gathering of data and construction of theories. Rather, perhaps primarily, she argues "the experience and lives of marginalized peoples, as they understand them, provide particularly significant *problems to be explained* or research agendas."[40] The relevance of feminist standpoint to research begins well before we are searching for data and solutions, touching also on questions of what projects to pursue, how, and why.[41]

The scope of our background, culturewide beliefs' influence on scientific inquiry is what justifies, for Harding, the importance of "strong reflexivity," the requirement to place the subject of knowledge, the knower or researcher (which may be an entire community), on the same critical and causal plane as the objects of knowledge, what is explicitly being researched. That is, her version of standpoint epistemology demands that we become theoretically aware of our own social and historical position, that the awareness and the study of this position gets included as part of the subject matter of any research project, rather than rendered invisible or outside the scope of inquiry. She argues that this, rather than any process attempting to eliminate bias by *excluding* consideration of our values and background beliefs from the research project, is essential to maximising the objectivity of our research, for achieving "strong objectivity."[42]

At this point, having hopefully gotten a handle on the basic claims of standpoint epistemology, we need to reintroduce some of the issues we discussed in the previous chapter, of idealisation and essentialism. In some ways, the methods for feminist research suggested by standpoint epistemology may look a lot like the method advocated by MacKinnon and Schwartzman.[43] Both tell us to take seriously the experiences of women in order to create some kind of representation of reality free from the distortions created by male interest. They differ slightly in that while MacKinnon's method aims at the articulation of some unitary women's

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39 Harding (1993), p. 69.
40 Harding (1993), p. 54.
41 Recall my discussions in chapter 3 of this thesis, regarding how "philosophers' choices to look at particular cases rather than others is, itself, a methodological issue."
42 See her discussion of strong objectivity in Harding (1993), p. 69- 72.
43 See chapter 4 of this thesis.

experience, situation, or perspective[44], the standpoint method aims at the creation of feminist standpoint, a theoretical accomplishment beyond the mere articulation of an existing situation.[45]

Nonetheless, standpoint epistemologies can look rather problematically idealised; some versions moreso than others. Hartsock's version of feminist standpoint epistemology is an example of a particularly idealised – and perhaps essentialist – standpoint theory. She is certainly aware of the danger of essentialising. After announcing her intention to abstract away from some details of women's lives in order to craft a single theory of women's exploitation, she writes "I adopt this strategy with some reluctance, since it contains the danger of making invisible the experience of lesbians or women of color. At the same time, I recognize that the effort to uncover a feminist standpoint assumes that there are some things common to all women's lives in Western class societies."[46] Though she is aware of the possibility of essentialising, she doesn't explicitly address the possibility very well in this essay, instead just noting it and pressing on.[47]

Hartsock's version of feminist standpoint epistemology is problematically idealised right from the start. She begins her analysis with the claim that "Whether or not all of us do both, women as a sex are institutionally responsible for producing both goods and human beings and all women are forced to become the kinds of people who can do both."[48] The idealisation in a statement like this is complex. The opening clause is clearly meant to guard against idealisation, emphasising that not all women have the kinds of experiences she will go on to discuss. The part about women's institutional role is perhaps just abstract enough to be accurate. However, the claim that "all women are forced to become the kinds of people who can do both" moves us towards massively problematic territory. Much is being idealised, pushed aside, made invisible by a statement like this. Most obviously, we have to wonder what exactly it might be for a congenitally

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44 Note however that MacKinnon is sensitive to the problem of false consciousness. See MacKinnon (1983) "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Towards Feminist Jurisprudence," *Signs* 8:4, pp. 635-658 p. 637, fn. 5.

45 Though it is sometimes unclear, MacKinnon's view may be closer to the standpoint view than I am suggesting here. Consider her claim in MacKinnon (1989), p. 87 that women's point of view is *created* by consciousness raising, rather than existing prior to the process. However it does seem clear that for MacKinnon this point of view is created merely through the open discussion of women's common experiences, rather than any additional theoretical activity. For more on this, see Jaggar's discussion of the difference between radical feminist epistemology and socialist feminist (standpoint) epistemology, in Jaggar (1983), chapter 11. MacKinnon seems to move between these two epistemological tendencies.

46 Hartsock (1983), p. 290.

47 We can already see a problem arising in just this quote. Hartsock seems to imply that a feminist standpoint must be developed out of only what is common to the lives of women in Western societies, ignoring the global scope of feminist struggle. Note I don't mean to suggest that the problem is her reluctance to attempt to craft a single feminist theory to cover all women globally; this caution is probably admirable. The problem is with her perhaps accidental assertion that the very possibility of *a* feminist standpoint rests entirely in the lives of Western women.

48 Hartsock (1983), p. 291.

infertile woman to become the "kind of person" who can produce human beings. The cissexism of such a statement will also be obvious to some readers.[49] Later in her analysis the "kind of person" element takes a backseat, as she focuses on the profound effects of *actually* experiencing pregnancy, and the epistemological relevance of experiences like "Menstruation, coitus, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation"[50]; events that are not shared even among all cisgender women, and certainly not always experienced or interpreted in the same ways. As Le Doeuff reminds us, "Even those physical events assumed to be most similar in all women, biologically speaking, can be experienced in extremely different ways."[51] Of course, this is not to doubt that such events may have great epistemological relevance in the lives of women who *do* experience them. However, it is problematically idealising to give these experiences such an essentially central role in the development of a common women's perspective, able to ground a unitary feminist standpoint.

More subtly, a huge amount of difference is being elided in Hartsock's apparently abstract discussion of the sexual division of labour, which actually focuses on the experiences of particular sets of women. For example, much of her analysis centres around the idea that women's lives are institutionally defined by their work in "the home,"[52] and the deeper connection with the material world this affords them. In this analysis, Hartsock completely glosses over deep structural differences in the nature of this work done by different groups of women. In particular, she ignores the widespread presence of women of colour working in the homes of middle- and upper-class white families, working *for* white women, freeing white women from the material work of cleaning and childrearing, just as so many women have freed men from that work. Though she wants to find what is common to all women's lives in Western societies, like the radical feminists discussed in the previous chapter, she fails to see both "one, that in a capitalist, racist, imperialist state there is no one social status women share as a collective group; and second, that the social status of white women in American has never been like that of black women or men."[53] As a result, she writes as though whatever it is that specifically explains and theorises the nature of black women's work in homes owned by white men and women, it is not the *feminist* standpoint.[54]

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49 Though, again, this is complex: it could well be true to claim that society attempts to force trans women into these institutionalised gender roles as a part of a process of legitimising their gender, but it would involve problematic idealisation to suggest that this process always succeeds, or to claim that all trans women transition, and so are subjected to that process.

50 Hartsock (1983), p. 294. Note she insists she is talkng about "motherhood as an institution rather than experience," but her discussion does not seem to be limited in this way.

51 Le Doeuff (1991), p. 227.

52 See Hartsock (1983), p. 291-293.

53 hooks (1982), *Ain't I A Woman* (Pluto: London), p. 136.

54 Hartsock later addressed the common accusation that this essay was essentialist in Hartsock (1998) "The Feminist

Though there are other, less essentialising motivations for standpoint epistemologies, mentioned above, nonetheless this tendency towards idealisation does not seem to be accidental, extraneous to the standpoint project, but rather rooted in the need to draw something coherent and unitary from deeply diverse groups. Bat-Ami Bar On suggests that whenever epistemic privilege is grounded in the valourisation of a social group's identity and practices, some idealisation must occur. "The kind of idealization that is entailed by valorization is problematic because rather than working from a conception of practices as heterogeneous, it includes some while excluding others, presupposing that there are practices that in one way or another are more authentically expressive of something about the oppressed group."[55] The logic of standpoint theory drives us towards this kind of essentialising idealisation, and Hartsock in particular makes no great effort to resist it.

In addition, idealisation in standpoint epistemology can result from the overwhelming focus on one particular standpoint, presented as complete and unitary, the feminist standpoint; especially when this standpoint is claimed to provide us with a position from which a true, undistorted view of the social world is *uniquely* available. It should not take much to realise that many of the justifications for a feminist standpoint must also suggest the possibility of other standpoints based in other marginalised social positions – an anti-racist standpoint, a queer standpoint, etc. – and that to suggest that any standpoint derived only from what is common to all women, including relatively privileged white women, could provide us with the kind of insights into society that these other standpoints must provide is certainly not viable, unless one holds the implausible radical feminist view that women's oppression is somehow more basic or fundamental than all other oppression. Furthermore, concerns about essentialism and intersectionality must tend to undermine the idea that any *single* standpoint could be identified for any broadly considered form of marginalisation, given the diversity of experiences within broad social categories.

Nonetheless, despite these problems, I believe that a less idealised form of standpoint epistemology is possible. Sandra Harding goes some way towards developing such a position. She takes the problem of essentialism somewhat more seriously than Hartsock, arguing that "the logic

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Standpoint Revisited," in *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays* (Westview Press: Oxford). Here she grants that her original analysis contained some problematic and essentialising simplifications, but also argues that many criticisms along these lines have failed to appreciate the Marxist roots of her work, and the importance of understanding a standpoint as something achieved through political struggle, rather than somehow biological or innate. Of particular relevance to my discussion, she suggests that "standpoint theory does not require feminine essentialism but rather analyzes the essentialism that androcentrism attributes to women," p. 233.

55 Bar On (1993), p. 92.

of the standpoint approaches contains within it both an essentializing tendency and also resources to combat such a tendency."[56] Ultimately, she advocates that we identify the contradictions in feminist standpoint theory, and theoretically articulate them, using them to improve our theories.[57] She identifies the resistant tendency against essentialism in standpoint epistemology's insistence on "strong objectivity," a commitment to placing the observer "in the same critical plane as the subject matters to be observed"[58]; that is, to making researchers aware of themselves not just as disembodied, disconnected thinkers engaging with some subject matter at arms length, but rather including themselves, their background beliefs, and social position, as part of the research project, part of what is to be studied, understood, and accounted for. This commitment, which underlies our understanding of women's standpoint as being epistemically privileged in a male-dominated society, commits women engaged in research to becoming aware of their own privileges, and the ways that these will tend to distort their research in ways analogous to the distortion of research done without attention to the position of women. So, "It should be clear that if it is beneficial to start research, scholarship, and theory in white women's situations, then we should be able to learn even more about the social and natural orders if we start from the situations of women in devalued and oppressed races, classes, and cultures."[59] That said, all of this is more a statement of the problem, rather than any real resolution of essentialising logic at the heart of standpoint theory.

Though Harding's discussion is an improvement on Hartsock's, and her instance on the existence of multiple privileged standpoints is important, it's still unclear how these are meant to fit into the logic of the theory. I think the prospect of a less idealised standpoint epistemology becomes somewhat clearer when we turn to the work of Donna Haraway. Like the other standpoint epistemologists, Haraway is working with the idea that "Feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*,"[60] and that objectivity is about "particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility,"[61] which she calls the "god trick." She too endorses the idea that there are "grounds for trusting especially the vantage points of the subjugated,"[62] but is more sensitive to the "serious

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56 Harding (1991), p. 180.
57 She spells this out more explicitly in relation to the contradictions between Enlightenment and Postmodernist feminist theories, Harding (1991), p. 181-184
58 Harding (1991), p. 178.
59 Harding (1991), p. 179-180.
60 Haraway (1988), "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14:3, pp. 578-599, p. 581.
61 Haraway (1988), p. 582.
62 Haraway (1988), p. 583.

danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions."[63]

Haraway's potential to resist the problems of idealisation discussed above stem from her conception of split and contradictory selves as the subjects of knowledge. "The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another."[64] As she rejects the unitary and singular subject, so too she rejects the idea of a unitary, single privileged standpoint, even as a combination of revealing positions: "There is no way to "be" simultaneously in all, or wholly in any, of the privileged (i.e. subjugated) positions structured by gender, race, nation, and class. And that is a short list of critical positions."[65] What this means practically is that "location is about vulnerability; location resists the politics of closure, finality, ... feminist objectivity resists 'simplification in the last instance.' That is because feminist embodiment resists fixation and is insatiably curious about the webs of differential positioning. There is no single feminist standpoint because our maps require too many dimensions for that metaphor to ground our visions."[66] It should be no surprise that this rejection of closure and theoretical finality resembles my discussion of intersectionality as provisionality, near the end of the previous chapter.

Though Haraway shares, with other standpoint epistemologists, the vision of coming to better accounts of the world through thinking from the position of subjugated peoples, she also draws out the more radical shifts in research methodology that are called for when we acknowledge idealisation and essentialism, and drop the myth of a single, unified, coherent body of oppressed people. Her vision of science and rational knowledge is one of "power-sensitive conversation," communication, "translations and solidarities," never closed and final, but always contestable, practised not by isolated individuals, but by communities, and aiming not at a view from nowhere, but rather for "the joining of partial views and halting voices," and "views from somewhere."[67] With this vision of an alternative epistemology comes a different way of seeing the world that is to be accounted for. Haraway insists on seeing the world not as a passive ground or resource to be discovered, but rather as an active, even resistant entity, which we must learn to join

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63 Haraway (1988), p. 583-4.
64 Haraway (1988), p. 586, emphasis hers.
65 Haraway (1988), p. 586.
66 Haraway (1988), p. 590.
67 Haraway (1988), p. 590. C.f. the discussion about intersectionality and provisionality in the previous chapter of this thesis. Consider also the role of communication in O'Neill's account of practical reasoning.

in conversation. "The Coyote or Trickster, as embodied in Southwest native American accounts, suggests the situation we are in when we give up mastery but keep searching for fidelity, knowing all the while that we will be hoodwinked … Feminist objectivity makes room for surprises and ironies at the heart of all knowledge production; we are not in charge of the world."[68]

Though less wholeheartedly than Haraway, Harding takes up some of these themes in her later essay *Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology*. She agrees that "the subjects/agents of knowledge for feminist standpoint theory are multiple, heterogeneous, and contradictory or incoherent,"[69] and that "the logic of the directive to "start thought from women's lives" requires that one start one's thought from multiple lives that are in many ways in conflict with each other, each of which itself has multiple and contradictory commitments."[70] She accepts that this is a challenge, but does not here give much guidance as to what such thinking might look like, only suggesting that this practice is already familiar to most of us from everyday contexts of negotiating conflicting interests or perspectives. She also notes the need, arising from the multiplicity of subjects, for feminists to engage with every other liberatory knowledge project (anti-racist, Marxist, etc.), and vice versa.

One new problem that arises when we move away from idealised theories of a single feminist (women's) standpoint, and towards the reality of multiple, interlocking standpoints, is that we are faced with the need to adjudicate which particular social positions may give rise to a revelatory standpoint, and which (in our current society) will not. The simple answer is that just those social positions marked by oppression can give rise to a revelatory standpoint, but this answer is complicated by the rise of right-wing political movements, representing the interests of groups usually conceived as dominant, which nonetheless articulate their claims in terms of oppression. Often these groups form as a kind of backlash, and claim to be oppressed by precisely those measures designed to rectify or mitigate the oppression of others. Some examples include white supremacists arguing white people are oppressed by affirmative action laws, Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) arguing men are oppressed by rape prosecutions, or fundamentalist Christian groups arguing Christians are oppressed by marriage equality. Of course we can look at these claims and simply note that no one is oppressed *on the basis* of being white, male, or (in western countries) Christian, but this begs the question against these reactionary movements.

Fortunately, in heeding a call for increased epistemic humility, and a resistance to

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68 Haraway (1988), p. 593-4.
69 Harding (1993), p. 65
70 Harding (1993), p. 66.

simplification, we need not abandon all our familiar critical and epistemic practices. That is, we can simply look at the MRA's claim that men are oppressed, and see that it is poorly supported. Remember that standpoint epistemologists have offered particular arguments for the claim that women, as an oppressed group, have access to less partial and distorted knowledge. For example, Harding argued this on the basis of women's status as outsiders, alienated from social power. Given the representation of men in politics, business and the media, it would simply not be plausible to argue that men are, as a class, alienated from social power. More broadly, though we must be wary of relying on statistics to provide evidence of oppression,[71] they can be useful in more obvious cases; figures such as the gender pay gap for many oppressed groups, rates of incarceration for people of colour, and rates of homelessness among queer people provide clear evidence of these being oppressed groups, where such figures overwhelmingly present men as being relatively privileged.

Even more directly, though we should be humble about our ability to evaluate arguments presented from a standpoint we do not occupy, nonetheless many of the arguments presented by these reactionary groups are, however generously and provisionally they are interpreted, simply and obviously bad or reprehensible. For example, cartoonist and MRA Scott Adams has argued that America is a female-dominated society on the basis of the fact that, regardless of what a man does on a heterosexual date, "access to sex is strictly controlled by the woman."[72] Even leaving aside the obvious way the claim of domination flies in the face of all available data about men and women's relative wealth and power, there seems to be no way of reading this argument that does not amount to "men are being dominated unless they have sexual access to women who would deny them sexual access; that is, to non-consenting women," i.e. rape apologism. Besides being reprehensible from any moral perspective, the argument is also nonsensical; so characterised, access to sex is *also* strictly controlled by men. A similar problem also exists in the common argument from the Religious Right that equal marriage violates their freedom of religion; it seems impossible to see this as anything other than special pleading for their particular form of religious practice, as a similar argument could be used to argue that equal marriage laws are *essential* for the religious freedom of those religious groups who celebrate same-sex marriages. Though these are

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71 See Delgado & Stefancic (1992), "Pornography and Harm to Women: 'No Empirical Evidence?'" *Ohio State Law Journal* 53, pp. 1037-1055.
72 Reported by Futrelle (2015), "Scott Adams: We live in a matriarchy because men have to get permission for sex," *We Hunted The Mammoth*, November 21, 2015, http://www.wehuntedthemammoth.com/2015/11/21/scott-adams-we-live-in-a-matriarchy-because-men-have-to-get-permission-for-sex/

just a few particular bad arguments, it seems quite generally accurate that arguments from these reactionary groups are characterised by bad faith, special pleading, false equivalences and harassment.

Rather than these reactionary groups, some more interesting and potentially difficult cases relating to where we can identify a liberatory standpoint can seen in the rise of new social movements from recently unfamiliar social groups, which do not identify themselves in opposition to an existing social struggle. Two fairly clear cases are the autism self-advocacy movement, the asexuality movement. In both cases there is fairly clear evidence of widespread, systematic mistreatment and marginalisation: in the first case from institutionalisation, abuse and torture,[73] and in the second from a society structured around compulsory sexuality. Both groups are making very challenging claims, employing unstable and unfamiliar concepts, but also have the advantage of forming connections with existing disability and queer movements respectively. Of course, this resembles the position transgender activists were in just two decades ago.

A significantly less clear case is that of people who understand themselves to be "transracial"; that is, as somehow belonging to a race other than that which society would usually class them as, on the basis of features such as ancestry. This claim seems baffling to most of us, and flies in the face of both the dominant understanding of race, and the alternative understandings presented by many critical race theorists. The few self-articulations of such "transracial" people that come to popular light are often steeped in obvious racism and apparent racial appropriation, and their arguments often inappropriately mimic the arguments of trans activists. Indeed, even the term "transracial" is appropriated from the language of people of colour who were adopted and raised by white families. However, Rebecca Kukla has argued that much discussion of this purported way of being has been "surprisingly historically short-sighted and lacking in epistemic humility."[74] After pointing out the similarity between arguments against the self-understanding of "transracial" and transgender people, she writes "I just don't have the confidence that would allow me to proclaim immediately that *this* time the critique fits, that there is no real phenomenon here, no human need or way of being that requires understanding and a reconfiguration of my settled concepts."[75] Ultimately, she does not suggest we abandon our critical faculties here, but just that

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73 For some context, see Ne'eman (2016), "The errors – and revelations – in two major new books about autism" *Vox*, http://www.vox.com/2016/1/21/10801846/autism-in-a-different-key
74 Kukla (2015), "Philosophers on Rachel Dolezal," *Daily Nous*, June 15, 2015, http://dailynous.com/2015/06/15/philosophers-on-rachel-dolezal/
75 Kukla (2015).

we "learn from the past and proceed a little more slowly,"[76] rather than dismissing these claims out of hand. Personally, though I strongly suspect that this "tranracial" identity rests in racism and essentialism, and I would insist that racist and appropriative claims and actions must never be pardoned in these cases, I agree with Kukla that epistemic humility calls for a more careful and forbearing approach to this phenomena than has been seen so far. However, in working out what we should think of an emerging position like this, we need to heed in particular the voices of those best placed to understand the relevant social issues, whether through expertise or position: that is, in this case, critical race theorists and people of colour.

Standpoint Epistemology and the Philosophy of Abortion

It is not difficult to see how taking seriously the position of standpoint epistemology would challenge any strong reliance on simple, universalistic first-personal methods in practical reasoning. The directive to start our thinking from the standpoint of women, or the broader directive to start our thinking from the standpoint of marginalised groups more widely, cannot be met by a solitary thinker engaging, even imaginatively, with their own private mental resources. Standpoint epistemologies challenge this vision of moral philosophical research on many points. They insist that undistorted research must be collective, taking place in the context of a community and of political struggle, rather than pursued by lone, disengaged thinkers. They insist on the importance of representing the world from some liberatory standpoint, where the creation of that standpoint necessarily involves (though goes beyond) listening to women, and members of other marginalised groups, and looking at their lives. They tell us not to *simply* rely on our background assumptions and intuitions, but rather to practice strong reflexivity, making our assumptions and their genesis part of the object to be researched, and studying them in ways that must take us beyond mere introspection (and, incidentally, beyond the usual methods of experimental philosophy),[77] towards awareness of the wider social and historical context.

I will briefly consider how some of these requirements may play out by looking at three different papers on the morality of abortion, though none of them explicitly claim to employ a standpoint methodology. The first is Michael Tooley's influential 1972 paper "Abortion and Infanticide,"[78] still widely read and often included on practical ethics reading lists. This paper

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76 Kukla (2015).
77 See Schwartzman (2012).
78 Tooley (1972), "Abortion and Infanticide," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 2:1.

argues that there is no morally significant difference between abortion and infanticide, and argues for the moral permissibility of both, by claiming that in both cases the fetus or infant lacks the self-consciousness that grounds a right to life. The argument proceeds in detachment from the actual conditions or circumstances of pregnancy, and considers only the intrinsic features of fetuses and infants, the conceptual contours of the relevant moral terms - such as sentience, self-awareness, and personhood – and the conditions that may grant a right to life. It is striking that in a 29 page paper on abortion, the word "woman" appears only five times. Any concern for what is at stake for women in securing a right to abortion is limited to a brief mention of how pregnancy may limit action and impair health, and a vague idea of the "burden of carrying a parasite to term."[79]

I take it that even as this influential paper partly argues for what is an important feminist demand (the legal permissibility of abortion)[80], its approach is nonetheless deeply inimical to the methodology suggested by standpoint epistemologists. There may be a very loose sense in which it starts research from women's lives, insofar as it considers something that overwhelmingly concerns women.[81] However, the research proceeds without *any* attention to women, women's lives, women's experiences, or anything resembling a feminist standpoint. In fact it comes across as a surprisingly clear example of thinking that is structured so as to be appropriate for an administrator,[82] where what is to be administrated is women's bodies and the "parasites"[83] they carry.

A very different, feminist approach to abortion and infanticide appears in Mary Anne Warren's paper "The Moral Significance of Birth."[84] Warren aims to defend a moral distinction between abortion and infanticide, and more broadly to challenge the common philosophical views that rights must be based on intrinsic (rather than social) features, and always on a single feature. To this end she argues against the focus past philosophers, such as Tooley, have placed on singular intrinsic features such as sentience and self-awareness. Though she evaluates arguments around these features much on their own terms, when it comes to providing her own account of what

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79 Tooley (1972), p. 53
80 Of course, in a sense it does not argue for a feminist *position*, but rather an extension of a classically liberal position on abortion.
81 It is important to note that not only women become pregnant - though this point is acknowledged by none of the papers I discuss here - and that not all women can or will. Often in the following discussion, and my later discussion of Judith Jarvis Thomson's work, I will simply be talking about 'women,' but I hope that much of the time, with suitable adjustments and some further analysis, what I say may also apply to trans men and non-binary folk who may bear children. I hope this simplification can be justified partly on the grounds that my primary concern is not with abortion per se, but rather with the methodology employed by the papers I discuss.
82 See Harding (1991), p. 128-9
83 To use a term Tooley seems to delight in. See Tooley (1972), p. 52.
84 Warren (1989), "The Moral Significance of Birth," *Hypatia* 4:3.

grounds a right to life, and applying this account to infanticide, her discussion is much more rooted in social reality and historical specificity. She argues that "Human persons - and perhaps all persons - normally come into existence only in and through social relationships,"[85] and refuses to abstract from this fact, as she argues for an account of personhood partly grounded in a child's being accepted as a member of a community. She engages in some historical analysis of the role of infanticide in various times and places, noting both that it is often "at least to some degree a function of patriarchal power,"[86] and that it is sometimes legitimately employed in tragic circumstances where sexual and political oppression have eliminated alternative options for women.[87] Her discussion of the harm that results from granting a strong right to life to fetuses is rooted in our social and political reality, as she cites examples of forced surgical procedures, and other severe restrictions on women's autonomy that currently take place in the name of the protection of fetuses.[88] Her eventual conclusion that infanticide is usually not justified is explicitly related to the circumstances of *our* society, which has "both the ability and the desire to protect infants"[89].

Though it perhaps does not go as far as it could in terms of strong reflexivity (and limitations of space may be relevant here), I think this paper demonstrates the kind of historical and social situatedness that must be so important to any moral philosophy that takes seriously the concerns of standpoint epistemology. Warren rejects the dominant trend in moral philosophy of defining central moral concepts like "personhood" and "rights" purely in terms of some neat atomic features, entirely in abstraction from the social reality where these concepts develop and are employed. She doesn't pretend that a moral issue like abortion can be considered entirely apart from political issues, and instead often grounds her discussion in consideration of the law, current medical practices, and gender inequality. She does not consider moral norms completely ahistorically, but rather notes the role that abortion and infanticide norms have had in supporting patriarchy. All this is consistent with the standpoint epistemologists' recommendation to keep our research and our background beliefs socially and historically situated, rather than pretending our thoughts can float free as a view from nowhere. Warren's approach is deeply incompatible with an approach to moral philosophy that only involves a philosopher consulting their own mental

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85 Warren (1989), p. 55.
86 Warren (1989), p. 54.
87 Warren (1989), p. 58.
88 Warren (1989), p. 59-61.
89 Warren (1989), p. 62.

resources, thinking through an issue in isolation from others' interests and from the real, messy world. Though Warren rightly critiques Tooley's assumption that an account of personhood can be given purely in terms of a single, intrinsic feature, it seems unlikely that Tooley could possibly come up with a more nuanced account using only the kinds of methods he employs, of comparing different abstract concepts and principles, crafting counterexamples, consulting intuitions and running thought experiments; implicitly, her argument against this assumption also constitutes an argument against his socially detached methodology.

Margaret Olivia Little's paper "Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate"[90] more strongly exemplifies the standpoint epistemologists' directive to start research from women's lives. She begins by noting that "There is something about abortion that is not captured however carefully we parse counterexamples or track down the implications of traditional classifications"[91] and that "The central figures in the abortion drama – fetus, gestating woman, and their relationship – are left out of the conceptual paradigm."[92] In particular, her paper aims to highlight the importance, to considerations of abortion, of "the fact that gestation occurs inside of someone's body."[93] She discusses the intimacy and deep intertwinement implicated in gestation, and how consent must take on a central importance in such situations, as its presence or absence can entirely change the character of how pregnancy is experienced and understood. She is eager to discuss the ethics of abortion in relation to the ethics of parenthood, intimacy, and relationships, focusing on the question of what a pregnant person's relationship and responsibilities to the fetus might be, rather than what abstract rights-granting features they or the fetus might possess. She ultimately suggests that this approach lets us make sense of what others take to be a paradoxical moral sentiment, among some women seeking abortions, who feel that "they do not have room in their life just then to be a mother, but they know if they continue the pregnancy they will not be able to give up the child."[94] In this way her paper can be seen as taking something from women's lives - the difficulty of squaring this attitude with standard moral theories - as a problem to be explained, and then finding a solution through engagement with women's lived reality.

Little's paper comes across as a strong example of thinking from women's lives, in a way that, as the standpoint epistemologists suggested, avoids some of the distortions pervasive in the

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90 Little (1999), "Abortion, Intimacy, and the Duty to Gestate," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 2.
91 Little (1999), p. 295.
92 Little (1999), p. 296.
93 Little (1999), p. 297.
94 Little (1999), p. 312.

more detached mainstream abortion debate. She maintains a sharp focus on the lived reality of women in relation to pregnancy, and directly confronts the personal and embodied aspects of this reality – gestation as intertwinement, as potentially intimate relationship, as the physical occupation of one body by another – that most other philosophers gloss over. She demands a more honest understanding of the risks and pains involved in pregnancy, noting "the neutral language of an obstetrics text hardly captures the lived reality."[95] She often draws us to consider directly the concerns of those most involved in pregnancy, as she notes that, in talking to women facing unwanted pregnancy, they are usually less concerned with the medical risks and the social costs, and more with "the distinct meanings of gestation and motherhood [...] what it means to be pregnant."[96]

It is also striking that she resists the urge to idealise and essentialise experiences of pregnancy and motherhood: she notes that "Just as women differ in their conception of the fetus's status, they differ in how they conceptualize the relationship they are in with that fetus."[97] This difference manifests both across, and within individual women.[98] She adds "For a woman ... who conceives of herself as already intertwined as mother, and the fetus as her child, it would take reasons approaching life and death to decline gestating; for one who conceives of herself as in a biological relationship with burgeoning life, lesser reasons will suffice." So, though her ethics of abortion centres the relationship between fetus and woman, as experienced by women, she refuses to idealise, to elevate one kind of relationship to the status of the *right* kind of relationship; she does not want to give us the one, single women's standpoint on pregnancy, the unitary way that women do and must relate to any fetus they may carry.

EPISTEMOLOGIES OF IGNORANCE

The study of epistemologies of ignorance has developed fairly recently within social epistemology, though it has roots in older traditions of anti-racist thought and literature. It may be seen as a epistemically negative project against standpoint epistemology's positive project; where standpoint epistemology focuses on the issue of how it may be that marginalised groups have a kind of privileged access to the truth, the study of epistemologies of ignorance focuses instead on the issue of how and why the socially privileged are so often unable to understand, or see the truth about

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95   Little (1999), p. 300.
96   Little (1999), p. 301.
97   Little (1999), p. 310.
98   And, although she doesn't address this, will likely be very different again for pregnant people of other genders.

the world they occupy. In particular, it takes us beyond the standpoint epistemologists' relatively quick references to epistemic perversion and distortion, and towards attempts to understand "the *specific* knowing practices inculcated in a socially dominant group. Where [standpoint epistemologies] argued that men, for example, have *less* interest in raising critical questions about male dominance, [epistemologies of ignorance argue] that whites have a *positive* interest in 'seeing the world wrongly' to paraphrase Mills."[99]

Charles Mills coined the phrase "epistemologies of ignorance" in his influential 1997 book *The Racial Contract*.[100] The idea here is that the racist code by which white people have agreed to live, and to regulate their relationship to non-white groups - the Racial Contract - prescribes an "officially sanctioned reality … divergent from actual reality."[101] This reality will contain such things as bogus justifications for colonialism and marginalisation, and false beliefs about the situation and worth of people of colour. In order to maintain belief in this officially sanctioned reality, white people must learn to, and agree to misinterpret the world. Thus they take on "an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional)".[102] This epistemology "precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of social realities."[103] Thus, as Alcoff puts it, "ignorance is not primarily understood as a *lack* – a lack of motivation or experience as the result of social location – but as a substantive epistemic practice that differentiates the dominant group."[104] Mills is explicit in arguing that epistemologies of ignorance have implications for moral epistemology, as it causes white people to "experience genuine cognitive difficulties in recognizing certain behavior patterns *as* racist, so that quite apart from questions of motivation and bad faith they will be morally handicapped simply from the conceptual point of view in seeing and doing the right thing."[105]

Mills provides a number of examples of how ignorance can be maintained by dominant epistemic practices, as part of the particular epistemology of ignorance that he calls White Ignorance: through the development and proliferation of concepts and ways of seeing, such as the

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99 Alcoff (2007), p. 47. I differ from Alcoff in that she considers standpoint epistemology to be a *type* of epistemology of ignorance, and uses "the structural argument" to refer more specifically to what I call "the study of epistemologies of ignorance," or more simply "epistemologies of ignorance."
100 Mills (1997), p. 18.
101 Mills (1997), p. 18.
102 Mills (1997), p. 18. Italics removed.
103 Mills (1997), p. 18. This point regarding the preclusion of transparency echoes standpoint epistemology's requirement of strong reflexivity.
104 Alcoff (2007), p. 27.
105 Mills (1997), p. 93.

concept of the "savage," and the widely used but massively distorted Mercator projection world map, that tend to lead us towards certain racist conclusions, and suppress the development of alternatives[106]; through a collective amnesia regarding the history of racial oppression, enabled through such things as education systems, publications, monuments, and a 'colour blind' ideology[107]; through testimonial injustice and the silencing of non-white voices via racial terror[108]; through economic and social barriers against non-white access to cultural resources such as presses and academia[109]; and through cognitive distortions and motivated irrationality, rooted in whites' group interest.[110]

More generally, the study of epistemologies of ignorance aims to reveal the ways that knowledge is systematically shaped and suppressed in a society marked by social domination. That is, the focus is not exclusively (or even primarily) on how (for example) explicitly racist individuals maintain their ignorant racist beliefs, but more broadly on what gets to be researched, accepted, promulgated and known in such societies, including among those who work to avoid attitudes such as racism, and sometimes among members of marginalised groups. As Mills puts it, "a nonracist cognizer […] may form mistaken beliefs […] because of the social suppression of the pertinent knowledge, though without prejudice himself."[111] Some projects exploring this kind of ignorance include Shannon Sullivan's investigation into the ignorance held by most U.S. citizens regarding Puerto Rico,[112] and Nancy Tuana's exploration of how ignorance regarding women's sexual pleasure is constructed and maintained in both scientific and non-scientific contexts.[113] Of course similar projects have also existed before the term "epistemologies of ignorance" was coined; consider, for example, Michèle Le Doeuff's discussion of how knowledge regarding contraception has been suppressed in France, via both formal and informal mechanisms.[114]

For my purposes, the significant insight from the literature on epistemologies of ignorance is that ignorance is not accidental or marginal. That is, we can't just see the kinds of ignorance that may appear in moral theories as mere mistakes, surprising lapses of knowledge hidden within a landscape of basically sound moral beliefs, to be rectified *simply* by more careful argument, or

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106 Mills (2007), p. 23-27.
107 Mills (2007), p. 28-31.
108 Mills (2007), p. 31-33.
109 Mills (2007), p. 33-34.
110 Mills (2007), p. 34-35.
111 Mills (2007), p. 21.
112 Sullivan (2007), "White Ignorance and Colonial Oppression: Or, Why I Know So Little about Puerto Rico," in Sullivan and Tuana (2007).
113 Tuana (2004), "Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance," *Hypatia* 19:1.
114 Le Doeuff (1991), p. 264-275.

more accurate evidence. Instead we must understand our patterns of ignorance to be very often highly systematic, rather than random, and as an essential, problematic part of our entire system of moral beliefs. As Lorraine Code puts it, "Social, sexual, racial contracts require, construct and condone an epistemology, sustained by and sustaining an *ecology* of ignorance that comes to be essential to their survival".[115]

This view of systematic ignorance presents a strong challenge to ordinary, non-politically aware methods in moral philosophy. In particular it will tend to undermine first-personal methods, especially as performed by privileged individuals, in relation to topics to which their privilege is relevant. For example, consider a philosopher thinking through issues of hate speech while occupying a social position which ensures that hate speech can never be (effectively) levelled at them. Most obviously such a philosopher would lack their own experiences from which to draw an understanding of the impact of hate speech. They would also likely be operating with concepts crafted and propagated by those with social and cultural power which tend to undermine more radical understandings and conclusions; consider for example how the term "hate speech" seems to identify the problem in individual attitudes and emotions, eliding the important role of asymmetrical power relations in actual instances of hate speech. If restricted to first-personal methods they would lack the resources to develop alternative conceptualisations. They would also be operating in an intellectual climate where voices and perspectives from those who suffer from hate speech have been systematically silenced and suppressed, while theories used to defend a perhaps opposed notion of "free speech" have had centuries to freely develop. They would face a motivational pull towards underestimating the significance of hate speech or the suffering that it causes, in order to defend their group interest in something like "the right to offend."

Furthermore, these problems are compounded by the fact that a thinker labouring under systematic ignorance may also be ignorant of the *relevance* of social position to the topic they are considering, and so to their own ignorance of that social position. In the case of race, this meta-ignorance is encouraged by a 'colour-blind' ideology, which posits an equality, both moral and material, between people of all races "on terms that negate the need for measures to repair the inequities of the past."[116] This widespread ideology enables the systematic denial of the importance of race. So, for example, a philosopher considering moral and legal theories regarding punishment may fail to see the importance of the vastly unequal way that incarceration is used against white

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115 Code (2007), "The Power of Ignorance," in Sullivan and Tuana (2007), p. 214.
116 Mills (2007), p. 28.

and non-white populations, or may simply suppose that this issue can simply be stipulated aside.[117]

Some of these conclusions look stronger than what is provided by the challenge from standpoint epistemologies, though these approaches are clearly related, and this may be a matter of emphasis. Many standpoint epistemologists emphasise the ability of the privileged to engage with the standpoint of the oppressed, the idea that anyone can, in principle, begin research from women's lives.[118] On the other hand, epistemologies of ignorance tend to emphasise the immense difficulty of doing this, by noting that, for example, white ignorance is more than just a perspective, or a collective of interests, but rather a systematic and deeply socialised way of seeing the world, an entire way of thinking rooted in racism, which has become a central part of *what it is* to be white.[119] This makes it clear that more intense and long term personal and political engagement is necessary to combat this form of ignorance.

Precisely how to combat epistemologies of ignorance has not yet been so widely discussed in this relatively new literature. Some way into this question may be found in Adale Sholock's paper "Methodology of the Privileged," which looks at how a number of white feminists have attempted to resist racist indoctrination, to find and develop non-oppressive ways of relating to those over whom they are racially privileged by white supremacy.[120] Sholock is especially concerned with how ignorance, and counterproductive ways of dealing with ignorance, can hamper these efforts. She looks at two methods in particular, and concludes by proposing her own.

The first method she considers, and attributes to Adrienne Rich and Minnie Bruce Pratt, is 'self-reflexivity,' a practice of intense self-scrutiny by which those of us who are white may attempt to make whiteness visible in our own lives, to work out what it means to us to be white, and how our lives and identities are marked by white privilege.[121] This is understood as a deeply personal method, consciously using experiential knowledge, but proceeding through self-reflection. One influential example of this kind of process (though not one Sholock cites) appears as the essay "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," by Peggy McIntosh.[122] In this paper, McIntosh conceptualises white privilege as a collection of special provisions that she can count on

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117 As I discuss in chapter 3.
118 Harding (1991), p. 277-288. See also Scheman (2011), *Shifting Ground: Knowledge and Reality, Transgression and Trustworthiness* (Oxford University Press: Oxford), p. 108.
119 Though, as we will see, Harding seems to share this insight in her development of standpoint epistemology
120 Sholock (2012), "Methodology of the Privileged: White Anti-Racist Feminism, Systematic Ignorance, and Epistemic Uncertainty," *Hypatia* 27:4.
121 Sholock (2012), p. 704-705.
122 McIntosh (1989), "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," *Peace & Freedom* July/August.

to help her through life, and she attempts to individuate and enumerate these benefits. She acknowledges the force of epistemologies of ignorance, as she notes that "whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege," and that "the pressure to avoid [the subject] is great, for in facing it I must give up believing in democracy."[123]

Unfortunately, as Sholock concludes, although this methodology is in some sense designed to combat ignorance, it is also severely limited by ignorance. In being a primarily self-reflective activity, this kind of procedure can help reveal, or make visible that which the white feminists practising it have some kind of lurking awareness of but refuse to face, those things which we worry might be true but want to believe are false.[124] However it alone is unable to take us further, to reveal those things that we neither know nor suspect, to reveal what has been hidden from us, suppressed, more completely silenced by the forces that operate within epistemologies of ignorance. Often it will be able to reveal that we are ignorant of something we should know, but not be able to provide the content that we are lacking.

Furthermore, Sholock worries that - though something like this practice may be an essential part of any 'methodology of the privileged' - without a concomitant shift in the attitudes that privileged thinkers tend to have towards ignorance and uncertainty, this intense self-scrutiny will often lead to a counterproductive form of self-doubt, "protracted navel-gazing and stagnating emotional turmoil,"[125] as white feminists continue to ferret out new ways that we are ignorant, but never find a clear end to that ignorance, or a stable foundation of confidence.

The second method Sholock considers, and attributes to Marilyn Frye and Sandra Harding, is one of 'racial sedition' or 'racial disaffiliation;' essentially, rather than seeking to understand whiteness, instead attempting to cease being white.[126] This method rests in the observation that whiteness is a political, rather than biological concept, and that to be white involves patterns of behaviour and privilege that could be, in principle, resisted or renounced. Indeed, Mills identifies subscription to an epistemology of ignorance as "part of what it requires to achieve Whiteness, successfully to become a white person,"[127] and partly dedicates *The Racial Contract* to "the white renegades and race traitors who have refused [the Racial Contract]."[128] Harding advocates that we

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123 McIntosh (1989). See also Spelman (2007) "Managing Ignorance," in Sullivan and Tuana (2007) for discussion of how not wanting to know certain facts plays a role in sustaining ignorance about those facts.
124 See Spelman (2007), p. 120.
125 Sholock (2012), p. 705.
126 Sholock (2012), p. 706-9.
127 Mills (1997), p. 18.
128 Mills (1997), dedication. See also his p. 107-9, and p. 126-7

"learn to think and act *not* out of the 'spontaneous consciousness' of the social locations that history has bestowed upon us but out of the traitorous ones we choose with the assistance of critical social theories generated by the emancipatory movements."[129] This is in keeping with the idea that, as part of a standpoint epistemology, we can learn to 'think from' standpoints other than those given to us; that, for example, men can contribute to feminist knowledge projects by learning to start research from women's lives.

This methodology seems to have significant risks. In particular, it may tend to promote a misguided 'opt-out' concept of privilege, one that ignores the realities of social power, a view where one's privilege can be renounced simply by changing one's attitudes and actions – not 'being racist' – without heed to the ways that privilege can be utterly out of our control, manifest in how we are perceived, in how we are treated, in our history, and in deeply rooted parts of our self-conception. Harding acknowledges this point as she notes "Those of us in the overly privileged groups cannot succeed in giving up the privilege that the social order insists on awarding us."[130] Linda Alcoff particularly worries that "some 'treasonous' whites, with white privilege still largely in place, might then feel entitled to disengage with whiteness without feeling any link of responsibility for white racist atrocities of the past; or they might consider a declaration that they are 'not white' as a sufficient solution to racism without the trouble of organizing or collective action."[131]

Furthermore this methodology is again complicated by systematic ignorance, as "racial disaffiliation seems to rely on the ability of whites to accurately identify and confidently combat white behaviours."[132] Though this method is welcoming of non-self-reflective sources of knowledge about what constitutes whiteness – and as we've seen Harding's epistemology emphasises actual engagement with those from marginalised social positions – Sholock argues it may "rest upon white people's overconfident belief in their ability to reject systematic racism, including whiteness and its privileges."[133]

Nonetheless Sholock draws an important insight from a methodology of racial sedition in the idea that this overconfidence may itself be an essential part of whiteness that needs to be challenged. She notes "even while whites are socialized through an epistemology of ignorance, we

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129 Harding (1991), p. 295.
130 Harding (1991), p. 295.
131 Alcoff (1998), "What Should White People Do?" *Hypatia* 13:3, p. 17.
132 Sholock (2012), p. 707.
133 Sholock (2012), p. 707. Harding also acknowledges this overconfidence, Harding (1991), p. 277.

are also expected to behave as authoritative agents of knowledge."[134] This leads her to consider a third methodology for privileged thinkers engaged in feminist projects, one which requires us to change our attitude towards ignorance and uncertainty. Ultimately she argues "a methodology of the privileged should not resolve the self-doubt of white anti-racists but rather strategically deploy epistemic uncertainty as a treasonous act against the cognitive privileges that support white Western hegemonies. In other words, we might more productively view epistemic uncertainty as a viable method rather than as a negative by-product of knowing ignorance."[135] Of course, this resembles the recommendation from standpoint epistemologists that we, in the language of Donna Haraway, give up the dream of the "god trick," the hope of epistemic mastery, of always being able to know everything.

Such a methodology would require people (such as myself) to admit that there are some things that we do not know, that we cannot simply work out, and that we may even not be *able* to know. It would require learning how to be wrong, to treat error and challenge not as a personal tragedy or a call to dig one's feet in, but rather as an opportunity to listen and to learn. Sholock suggests that this is harder than it sounds, and that such work would rarely be comfortable.[136] However, were such changes achieved, both in personal attitudes and in the culture of academic and political work, it would have a number of benefits. It would help the relatively privileged to deal productively with the cognitive anxieties and fear of error that can accompany our awareness of the possibility of ignorance and self-deception, which could help to make coalitional work more successful. It would also necessitate greater attention to and engagement with the work and analyses of marginalised thinkers, as finding ourselves in positions of *acknowledged* ignorance forces us to reach beyond our own position, to hear the voices of those who may know. This kind of change of attitude would go some way towards combating the epistemic injustices suffered by those who have been marginalised within feminist and philosophical communities.

This last point gestures towards the importance, for countering systematic ignorance, of *listening*, and of centring victims and survivors of moral harm in our moral philosophical projects.[137] Brison identifies listening to stories from victims as a fundamental characteristic of feminist theory and ethics. Feminist theory "takes women's experiences seriously. Likewise,

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134 Sholock (2012), p. 708.
135 Sholock (2012), p. 709.
136 Sholock (2012), p. 710.
137 Claudia Card discusses her decision to centre victims and their suffering in her understanding of evil, in Card (2002), *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil*, (Oxford University Press: New York), particular p. 9-12.

trauma theory takes survivors' experiences seriously. And we cannot know what these are a priori. We need to tell our stories, making sure to listen to those of others, especially when they're at odds with ours."[138] She draws upon her own painful experiences to argue against the possibility of understanding a moral harm from the armchair, noting that "imagining what it is like to be a rape victim is no simple matter, since much of what a victim goes through is unimaginable."[139] All the while, she issues harsh criticism of the institution of academic philosophy, which, after her trauma, "was of no use in making [her] feel at home in the world,"[140] and which made her acutely aware of the professional risks involved in presenting her own narrative of victimization, risks of not being taken seriously, or not being taken philosophically.[141]

This theme of listening is also taken up by Lorraine Code. She notes that "A set of - usually unstated - assumptions informs much prefeminist moral philosophy, to the effect that *moral deliberation*, as a matter of course, is adequately informed in its knowing of situations, actions, and states of affairs that require moral judgment."[142] She argues these assumptions falsely suggest that all moral agents and thinkers can readily puts themselves in each others' shoes, always know the same things and start from the same point in moral deliberation. This kind of picture "allows the often-unarticulated commonsensical knowings that inform moral deliberation to claim a degree of plausibility in consequence of which, it seems, no *negotiation* is required to establish the knowledge base from which it works".[143]

Following Brison, Code advocates instead an empathy rooted in listening to stories of victimization. She is particularly sensitive to the dangers posed by attempts at empathy that fail to get at the *others'* position, that involve us imagining *ourselves* in another's place, rather than genuinely hearing what *they* think, from their own position,[144] assimilating difference, rather than understanding it. To avoid this, her methodology "requires work, careful work, research, consultation, negotiation, interpretation... it requires constant checking for confirmation or misreading: it demands a certain epistemic humility prompted by wariness of premature closure and further complicated by a recognition that "we" cannot always know the truths of our own

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138 Brison (2002), p. 28. See also Foss & Foss (1994), "Personal Experience as Evidence in Feminist Scholarship,"
    Western Journal of Communication 58, pp. 39-43.
139 Brison (2002), p. 5.
140 Brison (2002), p. x.
141 Brison (2002), p. 35.
142 Code (2006), p. 209.
143 Code (2006), p. 209.
144 Code (2006), p. 220-1

lives."[145]

Again, we see the risks of employing an admirable feminist methodology – listening - without an accompanying change in our attitudes towards certainty and epistemic confidence. When we listen to others while supremely confident in our own ability to hear them, to correctly interpret them, to understand them, and to incorporate them into our theories, we run the risk of building a wall around our pre-existing world view, maintaining systematic misinterpretation and ignorance in order to preserve our way of seeing things – and our privileged positions - all while appropriating the experiences of those more marginalised than ourselves, and benefiting from the claim that we really *understand* them.

I hope this discussion has shown how any methodology capable of responding to the challenges presented by standpoint epistemologies and the existence of epistemologies of ignorance would require a deep change in how philosophy is practised and taught. In philosophy we learn how to advance our view, and certain ways of understanding others, but not when and how to change our mind. We learn how to think an issue through and engage with thought experiments, but rarely how to ask others for help, and to engage with the positions and experiences of others, rather than the formal arguments of philosophers. We learn how to stipulate and define, but are rarely encouraged to look closely at the lived reality of the issues we discuss. We learn how to refine a view, cutting off all possible objections through clarifications, stipulations, and bizarre counterexamples, but never when to let things stand, when to allow for ambiguity, when to acknowledge our epistemic limitations. We learn how to bite bullets, holding on to our position dogmatically and minimising the importance of counter-arguments, but rarely how to acknowledge that our theory might have errors, to take responsibility for the consequences of our positions and to truly understand the full force and motivation of others' objections.

THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS

To conclude this chapter I'll use some of the insights generated in the previous discussions to look at a specific methodology widely employed by moral philosophers, thought experiments. In doing so I will put forward a particular conception of how thought experiments may function in moral philosophy, without meaning to suggest that this picture is complete, or covers everything that thought experiments may do; my attention will be focused on how thought experiments may look like they could be a useful tool for *avoiding* problems of systematic biases or ignorance. Similarly,

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145 Code (2006), p. 206-7.

my focus will be on particular types of thought experiments: those used in moral philosophy to help us understand and develop a judgement about particular practical ethical questions - such as euthanasia or torture – rather than those used to develop or critique an entire moral theory, such as Rawls' original position, or Nozick's experience machine. Of course, this distinction is not completely sharp.

I take thought experiments in moral philosophy to be a tool designed to help us form a judgement about some moral issue by constructing an imaginative case which is analogous to the actual moral issue - in the sense of sharing all of the morally significant factors – while eliminating, abstracting away from, or *replacing* many other, morally insignificant features which may get in the way of our judging the original case. Once this imaginative case is constructed, any philosopher from any background is supposed to be able to imaginatively engage with the case, and form a judgement about it. Then, if the analogy is successful – if the imaginative case really has recreated all the morally significant features of the original case, without introducing anything *else* of moral significance, without retaining any of the distorting features we were trying to remove, and without introducing new distractions – we can argue that an analogous judgement must be made of the original case. So in short, my interest in thought experiments is in how they aim to help us, or anyone, *understand* a particular moral situation, by isolating its morally significant features, and removing any insignificant features that we may suppose will get in the way of us correctly understanding of the original case. Though my interest is in moral thought experiments more generally, I will guide this discussion by focusing on two particular thought experiments: Peter Singer's drowning child case,[146] and Judith Jarvis Thomson's violinist case.[147]

Let's start with Singer's case, which I take to be an example of a not particularly successful thought experiment; we will turn to Thomson's rather more successful case soon. Peter Singer famously employs a simple thought experiment in the course of arguing that those living in affluence have an obligation to take action, usually assumed to be cash donations, in order to improve the situation of those around the world living in poverty or facing crisis.[148] Although he begins his paper with a description of an actual crisis that faced people in East Bengal as his paper was written, he doesn't argue directly *from* this case. Rather this case, or the issue of international aid more generally, can be seen as his target moral issue, and he goes on to attempt the

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146 Singer (1972) "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1:3.
147 Thomson (1971) "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1:1.
148 Singer (1972).

construction of a thought experiment analogous to this case, in order to help us morally understand and form a judgement about international aid.[149] He introduces the thought experiment thus: "if I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out. This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing."[150]

This thought experiment recreates a few significant features of international aid cases: someone is in danger, I am able to assist and the cost to me would be minimal. It eliminates a huge number of the features of actual international aid cases, such as the distances involved, the number of people positioned to help, the complexity involved in rendering assistance, including political and logistical complexities, the number of people in danger, the precariousness of the situation faced by those in danger which may persist after assistance is rendered, the history of colonial injustice suffered by those in danger, and the historical and continuing complicity of many of us in affluent societies for the situation faced by those in danger. Any thought experiment which wanted to focus on some of *these* features as most morally significant would look very different, for example: "I am walking past a shallow pond. I then push some nearby people into the pond and steal their money. I spend a while guarding the edge of the pond, pushing people back in as they try to climb out. What now are my obligations towards them?"

Singer acknowledges some of these eliminated features - the first three – and so tries to argue that these features are not morally significant, and so not enough to make his thought experiment relevantly disanalogous to the case of international aid. He suggests the moral insignificance of distance follows from "any principle of impartiality, universalizability, equality, or whatever."[151] The matter of complexity is said to be irrelevant because "Expert observers and supervisors" can effectively direct our aid;[152] that is to say there is essentially no missing feature here, in both cases rendering assistance is a simple matter. He addresses the number of people positioned to help by slightly modifying his thought experiment – specifying that other people are

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149 To be precise, Singer does not initially introduce this thought experiment in order to lead us to a judgement, but rather as an illustration of a principle that he believes is doing all the argumentative work. However he does later employ this same thought experiment in order to defend the principle, and he is concerned with arguing that the morally significant features of this case make it analogous to the case of international aid.
150 Singer (1972), p. 231.
151 Singer (1972), p. 232.
152 Singer (1972), p. 232. I cannot pass up noting how the term "observers" seems to identify these people as among 'us,' observing the danger, rather than 'them,' involved in it. Presumably there is another adult standing at the side of the pool, telling you exactly how to wade in to save the child. Consider how Singer's argument here relies on us taking what Harding identifies as the positon of the administrator, Harding (1991), p. 128-9.

also walking past the lake – and by briefly arguing against the force of collective action problems.[153]

I think Singer's thought experiment is not particularly good precisely because these arguments are rather unconvincing, and we are left with the suspicion that his case is deeply disanalogous, in morally significant ways, to the realities of international aid. Singer has not helped us to understand the moral issue under consideration, to see what is really going on, or really at stake in these situations. Rather he has massively simplified the moral issues, in a way that leaves us with a firm judgement, but a lingering feeling that this judgement is surely irrelevant to the moral reality.

I would like to suggest that besides being unconvincing, this simplification is also dangerous. Consider in particular some of the disanalogous features that Singer didn't discuss; the background of injustice and collective responsibility. In short, in this paper, Singer completely erases the history and continuing reality of colonialism and imperialism that *must* be present in any full understanding of the morality of international aid. In doing this he produces something like what Mills and other anti-racist thinkers have identified as a 'colour-blind'[154] understanding, a view that race and oppression are simply not relevant as moral factors. Singer could argue that adding these features to his thought experiment would only strengthen his argument: if someone is under an obligation to help simply in virtue of our ability to help, the additional fact that they bear some responsibility for the harm, or that the harm is unjust, could only support that obligation, not counter it.

Unfortunately this argument ignores the deeper ways that Singer's particular idealised presentation of the moral issue frames his entire discussion. By presenting a thought experiment that eliminates the collective and political aspects of the target moral issue, Singer frames the issue of global inequality as highly individualistic, a matter of an individual's obligations to other individuals. This sidelines collective actions in favour of his own prefered solution, financial transfers.[155] These eliminations also hamper any true understanding of the moral issues, directly promoting western ignorance towards other parts of the world, casting non-western nations as helpless children, and promoting a view of the global south as mysteriously deprived or simply

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153 Singer (1972), p. 232-4.
154 Mills (2007), p. 28-31.
155 He does briefly and positively discuss more political actions, Singer (1972), p. 240, but this discussion has been unsurprisingly overwhelmed by the huge body of literature following this paper focused entirely on individual action, and by Singer's own long history of public campaigning for increased individual donations as a remedy for global inequality.

less fortunate than 'us,' rather than unjustly dominated, occupied, and exploited. Contrary to Singer's optimistic faith in expert observers and supervisors, this kind of western ignorance has significantly hampered many well-funded western-led attempts to improve conditions overseas. Furthermore, Singer's argument obviously supports a particular *reason* to help, a broadly utilitarianism reason: the fact that we are in a position to help at little cost to ourselves. The additional details regarding injustice and collective responsibility, even if they *were* to point towards the same solution (narrowly concieved), could nonetheless suggest an understanding of morality quite different to Singer's, one that could radically change an agent's understanding of what they were doing, why, and to what end, as well of how they should feel; there is a very great difference between redressing a wrong and helping those in need.

Let's turn instead to a more successful thought experiment, Thomson's violinist case. This case is a useful example as it is well-known, influential, and seems to be a particularly *good* use of a thought experiment, at least on the terms that interest me. Of particular note is that this is a thought experiment that pushes towards an important feminist conclusion – the moral right for women to procure an abortion in at least some cases – and, in contrast to what we saw with Tooley's paper, it does so by developing a specifically feminist concern: a woman's right to "decide what happens in and to her body".[156] If we can take this as an exemplary case of a successful, near-best-possible use of thought experiments, then hopefully by showing the limitations of even this use of thought experiments, I can reveal some general issues regarding their widespread use in moral philosophy.

This thought experiment is rather more complex and detailed than Singer's drowning child case. It asks you to imagine that one morning you find yourself to have been kidnapped, put in a bed, and medically attached to a famous violinist, who will die unless you stay there, attached, for nine months. You are physically free to unattach yourself, causing the violinist to die, but have been told that this would be immoral, as it would violate his right to life.[157] Thomson suggests we would rightly regard this claim as absurd, and should judge instead that in such a case it would be permissible for you to disconnect yourself, causing the violinist to die. Though Thomson's paper is concerned with defending the permissibility of abortion in a wide range of cases, her aim with this particular thought experiment is more limited: she simply wants to establish that even if we grant that a fetus a right to life, that right will not trump all considerations, but rather there are at least

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156 Thomson (1971), p. 48.
157 Thomson (1971), p. 48-9.

some cases in which a woman's right to control what happens to her body can outweigh the fetus' supposed right to life.

Of course, this thought experiment does not recreate all of the morally significant features of cases where abortion is being considered. Though it most closely recreates the moral landscape of cases involving rape - for example in the detail that the attached person has voluntarily undertaken no action that they would expect could get them attached to a violinist - it doesn't even do this particularly well. For one thing, note that Thomson herself does not believe that early fetuses have a right to life,[158] but is rather assuming this in order to meet her opponents on their own ground. If she is right about this, as I believe she is, we must see that in this way the thought experiment does *not* recreate the morally significant features of the case under consideration; in the violinist case, the violinist has a right to life, whereas in the real life moral case the analogous being, the fetus, does not have this right. And of course there are many other missing features that look to be morally significant, such as the particular physical experiences and risks of pregnancy, the emotional connection to a child after birth, and the particular violations involved during and in the aftermath of sexual assault.

Of course, these are features which not every philosopher, however situated, could be led to imagine purely through thought experimental techniques - not withstanding one male philosopher's shocking suggestion that "there is no problem imagining what it is like to be a victim" of rape.[159] More importantly, under the methodological logic of thought experiments these exclusions, and the disanalogous inclusion of a fetal right to life, can be justified by Thomson's goal of meeting her opponents on their own ground, and her rather limited goal; insofar as she is only concerned to show that there are some cases where a right to life is defeated by considerations of autonomy, she doesn't need to include these details to make her point. Her argument is made stronger by excluding them, as, if included, they would challenged by her opponents as being the kinds of distorting features or new distractions that thought experiments are designed to avoid.

It is worth noting that this same kind of defence cannot be applied to the exclusions in Singer's thought experiment. His drowning child case is employed to support a rather stronger principle, and set of moral judgements, than Thomson's violinist case. Furthermore, far from meeting his opponents on their own ground, some of the details he excludes, of distance and complexity, are precisely among the features his opponents will argue are important for

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158 Thomson (1971), p. 66.
159 Discussed in Brison (2002), p. 4.

understanding and judging cases related to international aid.

There is one other exclusion in Thomson's thought experiment that it is worth discussing in more detail. It is significant that in the violinist case the moral subject is described simply as "you," with no reference to their gender, whereas in the analogous real world cases the subject will very often be a woman, and always someone capable of bearing children. Among the features Thomson has chosen to remove in constructing her thought experiment are women, women's bodies, and any reference to the physical, institutional or cultural facts of reproduction.[160] Of course these are the features that were central to the illuminating analyses by Warren and Little, discussed above.

At the risk of reading too much into it, we could take this exclusion as an attempt to avoid the distorting influence of male bias, which might make some readers judge it permissible to restrict freedom for women in a case where they would not restrict freedom for men, or for themselves. Similarly, the case avoids any potential influence from certain kinds of ideology of reproduction. Thomson herself raises the possibility that a gendered double standard might be operating in relation to attitudes towards abortion when she notes "in no state in this country is any man compelled by law to be even a Minimally Decent Samaritan to any person... By contrast, in most states in this country women are compelled by law to be not merely Minimally Decent Samaritans, but Good Samaritans to unborn persons inside them."[161] This reading of what is going on would fit Brownlee & Stemplowska's idea of how to construct a thought experiment: "the possibility of bias is not a reason to abandon theorizing that might be subject to it. It is a reason to guard against it within the parameters of the case."[162] So, we guard against the influence of any possible implicit bias against women by removing them from the case. Note how neatly this approach fits with a liberal epistemology, which aims to avoid and set aside bias, rather than a standpoint epistemology, which aims to face biases head on, accounting for them and taking responsibility for them. I would like to suggest that this attitude towards bias is deeply implicated in the use of thought experiments, even central to the justification for their use.

However, let's look more closely at whether this approach is successful in this particular case. The violinist case removes women from the description of the case we are to judge, removing the immediate possibility of gender bias operating on our judgements. Anecdotally, there seems to

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160 Except for a few: the violinist case takes place in a medicalised context, and lasts nine months. Also, these features reemerge, in sometimes unusual forms, in Thomson's subsequent thought experiments in the same paper.
161 Thomson (1971), p. 63.
162 Brownlee & Stemplowska (2016), "Trapped in an Experience Machine with a Famous Violinist," in *Research Methods in Analytical Political Theory,* ed. Blau (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge)

be widespread agreement with the judgment Thomson wants us to make, moreso than with her following cases, where women and babies are reintroduced. But complications will arise when we try to move by analogy to real life cases. Here women will have to be reintroduced. We can imagine someone who reacts to this in a straightforwardly bigoted way: "ah, now women are involved, I no longer agree. Certainly I may ethically unplug myself from the violinist, but a woman could not." Of course such a person is unlikely to appear in philosophy; such barefaced double standards just wouldn't fly. But then even outside philosophy, patriarchal ideology is rarely so blatant. Instead, other reasons will be found to object to the analogy, reasons rooted in cultural attitudes towards women, reproduction, and rape. People will argue that, unlike in the violinist case, women could always avoid pregnancy, that women have often invited the possibility of pregnancy, that there is some relevant special relationship between the woman and the fetus she bears, which we lack with the violinist. Of course, these are exactly the kinds of reasons Thomson tries to head off through the rest of her paper, often through the construction of further thought experiments. But what exactly is going on here? We sideline the central issues in debates over abortion, the issue of women's right to control over their body and reproduction, presumably so we can keep working such opponents into a position where they finally have to say "I have no philosophically respectable reply to your claims, and am unwilling to admit, or to face the possibility that my objection to abortion is *really* based on ideology and group interests, so I suppose I better agree that abortion is permissible." We successfully lead our opponents to agree with our position, but leave the entire misogynistic complex of background beliefs and attitudes, which led to their initial position, completely untouched, and unmentioned. As Little has said of the philosophical debate on abortion, "even careful and clear-headed application of the usual tools seems to yield analyses that feel orthogonal to the subject."[163]

Ultimately I don't want to dispute that, on their own terms, thought experiments can be successful; perhaps Thomson's violinist case is a successful thought experiment, one that can lead readers to think "this event which could happen to a man is obviously a matter of autonomy, so this other analogous event must also be a matter of autonomy, even if overwhelmingly happens only to women." But note it is only necessary to make this argument on these terms because of certain attitudes common among the privileged, and thus common within philosophy to the point of *being* philosophical method: philosophers do not take seriously the testimony and experiences of

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163 Little (1999), p. 295.

victims of injustice when determining the moral landscape. If these experiences and testimony were taken seriously, those who experienced or were subject to pregnancy could simply tell philosophers something along the lines of "in my case, unwanted pregnancy is a deeply affecting and harmful compromise of my bodily integrity, and I understand any restriction over the control of my body in such circumstances to be a severe restriction of my personal autonomy." My point is not that this would completely end the debate and put moral philosophers out of a job; there would still be a lot to discuss regarding pregnancy, including its connection to wider issues of social control of women's bodies, and the role of that control in Patriarchy. But it would allow us to establish the moral landscape, the relevant factors in further moral debate, without relying on complicated, contentious, obfuscating and sometimes unreliable thought experiments to determine the basic fact of *whether* women, and others who may get pregnant, are right to see abortion the way they do.

The problem here seems to rest in a philosophical methodology which tells philosophers that they must be able to, in principle, do all the work of moral discovery themselves; the insistence on what I've called universal first-personal methods. The violinist case lets cisgender male philosophers think about the morality of abortion without ever thinking of anyone other than themselves. It saves them from the necessity of empathising with women by letting them empathise instead just with a hypothetical version of themselves, accessible through pure imagination. The thought experiment is such that it could've been crafted entirely by a cisgender male philosopher, though of course in the real world it is no mere coincidence that a woman came up with it. This is reasoning that 'anyone,' suitably restricted, could follow along with; indeed, it goes further than that in appearing to be reasoning that anyone could come up with, given just a small amount of abstract information about the subject.

Unfortunately relying on a thought experiment like this rather than taking seriously direct testimony of personal experiences has costs. The violinist case relies on a reader taking the analogy seriously, and on a prior commitment to the idea that what must not be done to men must also not be done to women. It not only puts to the side, but completely hides from discussion broader feminist issues regarding abortion, such as the connection to wider issues of bodily autonomy, and patriarchal interest in control over women's bodies. It works to depoliticise the debate over abortion, which obscures the nature of what are really political objections to the arguments. It promotes and perpetuates an attitude, within philosophy and the wider culture, of not taking the

experiences of the marginalised as important, reliable or relevant, of only understanding moral issues through their relation to the privileged. And perhaps most importantly, though this thought experiment may often make its point, this methodology potentially leaves us unable to deal with so many other cases for which similar analogies could not be constructed. When we commit to the methodology of doing moral philosophy through thought experiment and intuition rather than experience and testimony, we close off the possibility of truly understanding, in a philosophical context, a huge variety of moral pictures that may not be able to be recreated through analogy.

Consider the experience of a young woman who hates her own body in the knowledge that it will never fit social beauty norms that are simply not meant to accommodate people like her. Consider the neurodivergent, living in a hostile, misunderstanding and arbitrarily belligerent world. Consider those whose lives are severely constrained, facing a society which refuses to take seriously, or even consider, their mobility needs. Consider being constantly and relentlessly faced with questions and scepticism about the most basic details of one's social identity. Consider microaggressions, marginalisation, desperate hopelessness. Will we be able to craft neat, compelling analogies to help us understand these experiences? Will you get a full picture of these injustices by just thinking really hard about them, in isolation from testimony, experience and empathy? So long as we continue to privilege a methodology which avoids or marginalises engagement with the experiences of victims of injustice, we not only make certain moral issues impossible to understand, but we inevitably exclude them from the practice of moral philosophers.

In the course of this chapter, I hope to have made a case against such a socially detached, universalistic first-personal methodology in moral philosophy. I have attempted this by drawing upon the resources of standpoint epistemologies and epistemologies of ignorance, which show how our social privileges can systematically distort our thinking. These distortions can only be rectified through processes designed to acknowledge and take responsibility for our social position, rather than setting it aside it. Such processes include reflexivity – by which we situate ourselves within our research projects, highlighting our biases and ignorances - and deep, empathic, politically engaged attention to the voices and arguments of those who suffer injustice. Such methods are deeply unfamiliar within mainstream moral philosophy, and are often in conflict with the usual methods, such as thought experiments, which centre the perspectives and judgements of the individual philosopher, while making their particular situation and biases invisible.

CHAPTER 6 - PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION AS MORAL PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD

In this chapter, I discuss the possibility of changes to the methods of moral philosophy – what philosophers do when they take themselves to be doing moral philosophy – which are somewhat more radical than that discussed in the previous two chapters. The directives to be wary of the use of abstraction in moral theory, and to consider the limitations of universalistic first-personal methods, are important, but limited insofar as they may leave untouched the basic picture of a philosopher writing essays, engaging with a variety of sources, attending conferences and talks, teaching students, and so forth. Here I will discuss the challenge that arises from personal transformations in moral philosophy, and how their importance may lead us to see active, political engagement with the world as an indispensable method for philosophers to improve their moral views, individually and collectively.

Talking about the experience of having a child, L. A. Paul writes "A personally transformative experience radically changes what it is like to be you, perhaps by replacing your core preferences with very different ones." Also "it may change your personal phenomenology in deep and far-reaching ways."[1] Though such transformations may be triggered in an instant, by a single event, they may also be rather protracted experiences, taking place over a length of time. They may involve changes to personality traits, such as the development of self-assurance or integrity,[2] and the abandonment of self-negation or self-hatred.[3] They can involve a shift in social identity. They can also radically change the way we see the world. So, they are personally transformative, epistemically transformative – changing what one is inclined to believe, or in a position to know - and behaviourally transformative. An important case of personal transformation is the process of coming to feminist consciousness, or 'feminist awakening,' which involves "changes in behavior [that] go hand in hand with changes in *consciousness*: to become a feminist is to develop a radically altered consciousness of oneself, of others, and of... 'social reality.'"[4] I will return to the specific features of feminist awakening later, but will begin by looking more generally at the place that such transformations may have in moral philosophy as it is

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1   Paul (2015) "What You Can't Expect When You're Expecting," *Res Philosophica* 92:2, p. 8.
2   See Babbitt (1996), *Impossible Dreams: Rationality, Integrity, and Moral Imagination* (Westview Press: Oxford), p. 39.
3   See Bartky (1990), *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Epistemology of Oppression* (Routledge: New York), p. 21.
4   Bartky (1990), p. 12.

currently practiced.

Reflective Equilibrium and Radical Revisions of Belief

A useful place to start is with DePaul's discussion of "discontinuous revisions of belief" – radical shifts in moral positions – within the context of reflective equilibrium.[5] DePaul contrasts two distinct conceptions of reflective equilibrium; a conservative conception of the method, and a more radical conception. Both agree on a basic outline: very roughly, a person begins with their moral beliefs, eliminates the ones that are obviously epistemically sub-par, then forms principles that explicate the remaining judgements, revising both judgement and theory in order to resolve conflicts, and similarly brings the resulting theory into coherence with their other background views, including the challenge from possible alternative moral theories.[6]

Where these conceptions differ is in the role given to discontinuous revisions of belief. The conservative method licences revisions of belief only when those revisions "are those *required* to make the initial system of moral beliefs cohere,"[7] with one another and with all background beliefs. Thus, other kinds of moral belief revision, ones not deriving from prior beliefs, are ruled out, perhaps as irrational, but at least as not part of the methodology of reflective equilibrium, which is the method by which, it is supposed, we are to do moral philosophy. So "This version of the method can be seen as aiming at making a person's moral convictions at a given time explicit and precise."[8] DePaul suggests that this method "suppose[s] that when we begin moral enquiry we already possess as much of the truth about morality as we ever will. The harvest is over and moral enquiry amounts to no more than separating the chaff from the grain."[9] It should be obvious, particularly in the light of my discussion of ignorance in the previous chapter, why this strikes me as an inadequate methodology.

By contrast, "The radical conception of reflective equilibrium allows for, and indeed expects, revisions of beliefs and degrees of belief that go beyond what is necessary to resolve conflicts in favour of more strongly held beliefs."[10] He gives the example of moral conversions, such as may occur to a person who reads Marx or Nietzsche for the first time and has their entire moral worldview shift, not in order to better systematise their prior moral beliefs, or to resolve

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5   DePaul (1987), p. 469.
6   See DePaul (1987), p. 464-5. This account follows that of Daniels (1979), "Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics," *The Journal of Philosophy* 76:5.
7   DePaul (1987), p. 467, emphasis mine.
8   DePaul (1987), p. 467.
9   DePaul (1987), p. 470.
10   DePaul (1987), p. 468.

newly-spotted conflicts – we may even suppose their prior moral worldview was totally coherent – but simply because this new worldview, in its totality, appears utterly compelling. "The person simply abandons at least some of her old considered moral judgements or background philosophical commitments and adopts a new set of commitments."[11] DePaul argues that the conservative conception of reflective equilibrium cannot account for such an experience, or include such changes of belief within its recommended methodology.[12]

Further, though reading Marx or Nietzsche will obviously count as a legitimate philosophical activity, DePaul also wants to make room for similar discontinuous belief changes occuring on the basis of all kinds of other experiences - such as engaging with art, meeting new people, facing a moral choice, or a mystical or spiritual encounter - and to suggest that such changes may be rational when they are somehow appropriate to the experience. He calls such events "formative experiences,"[13] a notion which presumably includes, but is broader than the specifically transformative experiences I will discuss later in the chapter, which involve a deeper change in self. There is an important point to note here: even a defender of a conservative conception of reflective equilbrium, such as Norman Daniels, would accept that sometimes our moral beliefs have been formed, and continue to change, on the basis of experiences like these.[14] The difference is that while the conservative conception sees such changes as part of the background, the starting point we bring to the method of reflective equilibrium, the radical conception explicitly aims to include such experiences as potentially rational parts of philosophical method, as part of what we do, and must do, in our philosophical pursuit of justified moral belief.

The radical conception does not just *make room* for the changes in belief brought about by these experiences, it also encourages us to seek them out, highlighting how our moral beliefs may be irrational when formed on the basis of a lack of exposure to the kinds of experience which might lead us to abandon those beliefs (as, for example, exposure to nature may lead one to abandon anti-environmental attitudes).[15] Thus, for DePaul, some non-purely-reflective acts, acts of seeking out actual challenging experiences in the world, must be part of any sound method of reflective equilibrium, and part of our philosophical methodology.

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11 DePaul (1987), p. 469.
12 DePaul suggests that this failure may be attributed to an attitude that "the experience of any ordinary adult will do," which I take to be a manifestation of the universalistic first-personal approach in ethics. DePaul (1988), "Naivete and Corruption in Moral Inquiry," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48:4, p. 619.
13 DePaul (1988), p. 620-623.
14 See Daniels (1979), though he talks only occasionally and briefly about how we come about our starting point.
15 DePaul (1987), p. 474-5.

This point can be generalised beyond DePaul's criticism of conservative conceptions of reflective equilibrium: though different mainstream moral theories and methodologies grant a variety of epistemic roles to experience, experience rarely moves beyond the background of such theories. For example, Sidgwick reflects upon his own experiences of pleasure and pain in order to establish the hedonism at the heart of his Utilitarian theory,[16] and some theories may include some experience of moral education among the preconditions for being able to make right moral judgements. However, seeking and appreciating challenging experiences is rarely recommended as part of method by which we (philosophers) are to improve our moral beliefs. Consideration of such experiences rarely forms part of philosophical practice. Though students of philosophy are directly encouraged to, evaluated and accepted on their ability to, engage with a certain style of reasoning activities – the construction of arguments, consideration of counterexamples, interpretation of texts, etc – they are rarely encouraged to engage with the kinds of experiences that might shake their worldview in less structured, argumentative ways, such as through direct engagement with a political struggle, or through non-argumentative conversation with someone affected by some moral issue.[17] Similarly, we rarely see practicing philosophers including some engagement with life-changing experiences in their philosophical work, as, in an uncommon counter-example, Brison discusses in depth her experience of violent sexual assault, and the deep impact this event, and its aftermath, had on her philosophical and moral understanding.[18]

Still, we cannot simply recommend that philosophers seek our every experience that might cause changes to their moral views, as not every discontinuous change of belief is an epistemic improvement. DePaul explores this point in terms of naivete and corruption[19]: though it seems that we must seek out experiences which destroy our naivete, we must also avoid, or at least cannot recommend, ones that would be corrupting. We could take corrupting experiences to include brainwashing or indoctrination, but DePaul also offers a much more interesting example:

> Suppose that Janet is a person who has been brought up to value pre-marital chastity and marital fidelity very highly. Janet has not simply accepted her childhood teaching on blind faith, but has thought long and hard about the morality of sexual relations outside of marriage and considered what the proponents of such relations have to say in their behalf. She has identified what she considers to be the weak spots in the arguments offered by the proponents of liberal

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16 See Sidgwick (1901), Book ii, Chapters ii and iii.
17 Cf. DePsaul's distinction between "reasoning experiences" and "formative experiences," in DePaul (1988), p. 620-623.
18 Brison (2002).
19 DePaul (1988).

sexual morals and constructed arguments for her view from premises that she finds deeply compelling even after long critical reflection. In short, suppose that Janet has attained a point of wide reflective equilibrium in which she holds sexual relations outside of marriage to be immoral. It seems to me that Janet might well correctly judge that there are experiences that would lead her to alter this point of view, for example, reading erotica and romance novels with an open mind, watching (well made) pornographic films, and having sexual relations with numerous (sensitive and experienced) partners. But the natural thing for Janet would be to avoid these experiences on the grounds that they would corrupt both her character and more importantly, at least in the present context, her moral judgment.[20]

DePaul's question, then, is how do we sort the cases in which naivete needs to be dispelled through experience from those in which experience would tend to corrupt people's moral attitudes. He suggests two approaches to this question: a liberal approach, which directs people to use their own epistemic standards to judge what kind of experience would be corrupting, and what he calls an "Aristotelian" approach, which brings independent standards to identify the experiences that an agent needs to have.[21] DePaul has concerns with both approaches, as he argues that the liberal approach will not do enough to challenge deeply entrenched naivete,[22] while the Aristotelian approach fails to account for his intuition, in the case of Janet, that she is epistemically right to avoid those experiences, as corrupting, regardless of whether or not they are *in fact* corrupting.

Obviously I have no interest in the liberal approach, and its commitment to a liberal neutrality which requires us to take a person's epistemic standards as sacrosanct; my intention in the previous chapter of this thesis has been to argue that the actual pre-existing epistemic standards that most of us operate with are deeply problematic, distorted by privilege and systemic ignorance. However, there is also something not right with the so-called Aristotelian approach DePaul outlines, which he also calls "conservative," as he suggests it relies on our employing particular moral conceptions.

DePaul is worried about this method on the grounds that it involves "entirely abandoning the ideal of a moral methodology that is neutral between substantive moral theories."[23] In a sense

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20 DePaul (1988), p. 630.
21 See DePaul (1988), p. 631-635.
22 Later DePaul settled on a very slightly modified version of the liberal approach, see DePaul (1993), *Balance and Refinement: Beyond Coherence Methods of Moral Inquiry,* (Rouledge: London), p. 169-183. This choice was influenced by his goal "to answer a question [about rationality] that is raised from an egocentric point of view," (p. 179), a goal which I don't share for reasons that should be clear from my previous chapter.
23 DePaul (1988), p. 634.

this is an ideal I have already abandoned, as I agreed with Schwartzman, in chapter 4 of this thesis, that attempts to be politically (or morally) neutral in our methodology will tend to lend support to an implicit male-dominated status quo. But DePaul's worry here, signalled by his understanding of this methodology as conservative, and his concern about "abandoning coherentism,"[24] seems to be slightly stronger: that, in giving up the liberal approach, we would have to start with particular substantive, foundational moral conclusions, and craft a methodology which simply leads one to those (already chosen) conclusions.

We can look closer at the Janet example to see whether this must be the case. Much is hidden, and perhaps idealised in DePaul's construction of this case. For example, it is unclear exactly what the content of Janet's sexual morality is: does she judge that chastity and fidelity are noble, valuable, or simply right-for-her, and so aim to respect these values in her own life, or does she also judge and harass others for failing to live by these standards, object to her tax money being spent on sexual health clinics, and publicly campaign for abstinence-only sex education? I think we would clearly be inclined to judge her naivete much more harshly if the latter were the case.

More generally, we are not shown the connections between this element of her morality and her wider moral worldview. A radical feminist may argue that a conservative sexual morality is a violent sexual morality, one that aims to keep women in subjugation to men and in competition with each other, one that limits women's freedom to live in ways that are not oriented around men, play a wider role in the social and political world, and develop an understanding of their own sexuality. This is presumably the kind of argument that DePaul must think Janet has considered and rejected, but we would need to know exactly how she rejected it, and what she thinks about these issues, before we can really judge this case; if Janet rejects these arguments simply because she believes that it is right and proper for men to occupy and dominate a public sphere while women are restricted to a private sphere, again we would be more inclined to judge that her naivete needs to be challenged. Furthermore, by ignoring the interconnections between Janet's sexual morality and her wider moral worldview, DePaul ignores the ways her sexual morality may be challenged indirectly, even through experiences that have nothing to do with sexuality.

In others ways too, DePaul severely limits the kinds of experiences Janet might pursue to challenge her moral views. He mentions she may read pornography or erotica, or have some

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24   DePaul (1988), p. 635.

diverse sexual experiences. These are plausibly experiences that are morally ruled out by Janet's existing sexual morality, and though DePaul wants this example "to call upon epistemic, not moral, intuitions,"[25] it is likely that this problem is driving our judgement. But we should consider other ways that Janet's views might be challenged, even ways that focus directly on the issue of sexual morality. For example, Janet may befriend a polyamorous person,[26] follow a sex worker on Twitter, volunteer at a sexual health clinic, join a reading group that discusses issues of sexuality, watch a non-pornographic film concerned with sexual liberation, read about the history (rather than just the arguments) of second-wave feminism, etc. Certainly some of these experiences may be very challenging for Janet, but they look unlikely to be morally ruled out by her existing morality (and again, if they are, then that existing morality starts to look a whole lot more problematic). Might they nonetheless be morally corrupting?

For DePaul the picture looks like this: If we follow the liberal model, we can say that these experiences are corrupting because Janet deems them to be corrupting, insofar as she judges that they would mislead her - perhaps the friend would be tempting, the group would be browbeating, and the film would be emotionally manipulative – and this judgement is justified by her existing epistemic standards. If we follow the Aristotelian model, we could say these experiences are not corrupting, but we only say that in virtue of *our* judgement that these are just the kinds of experiences Janet needs to have to combat her naivete, which seems to rest on a prior judgement that there is something wrong with Janet's sexual morality, and that she would be right to modify or abandon it.

However, something seems to go wrong in this elaboration of the so-called Aristotlelian model. What particular substantive moral theory would we assume by suggesting that, despite Janet's judgement, these experiences would not be corrupting? Let's focus on the kind of experiences where Janet communicates with or listens to people with a different relationship to sexuality than her own: such experiences may help combat Janet's naivete by exposing her to ideas, worldviews, attitudes and interests that she may otherwise remain ignorant of. This judgement alone does not *require* us to believe that Janet was wrong in her original moral worldview; one could hold the right kind of beliefs, but do so naively.[27] This judgement does require something like the belief that there is something to be gained by attending to the

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25 DePaul (1988), p.634.
26 Preferably in a way that does not involve saying "Hello, please be a means to help me improve my moral views."
27 Cf. DePaul (1988), p. 625-626.

experiences and testimony (broadly speaking) of those unlike ourselves, with worldviews and situations unlike our own. We could see some particular moral beliefs underlying this: we would have to recognise these other people as having kind of reason or real interests behind what they do. If Janet saw these others as sub-human, mindless, or simply evil, then *she* may see no reason to think anything valuable could be gained by listening to them, but at this point I think we should be fairly comfortable with rejecting the liberal approach, and simply saying that Janet is disastrously wrong in her judgement here.[28] Similarly, in order to not think such contact would be corrupting, we would have to believe that these people would not irresistibly mislead, confound, or manipulate Janet. That is, we would have to be not *completely* in the grip of testimonial injustice (seeing them as liars), hermeneutical injustice (seeing them as speaking nonsense) or an epistemology of ignorance. Perhaps further conditions would need to be in place as well, but my point here is just that the kind of assumptions we would have to make in order to see this kind of activity as not corrupting, though they may constitute particular moral beliefs, will fall way short of being a complete, particular moral theory, or even the belief that Janet is *wrong* and some other particular, opposed moral view is totally right.

DePaul would probably think this is a fairly minor point. For him, the important distinction seems to be that his preferred "liberal approach to moral inquiry is committed to the idea that an adequate method of moral inquiry must be neutral between substantive moral conceptions. Conversely, a conservative approach will hold either that there is no such neutral method of moral inquiry or that no neutral method can be adequate."[29] For reasons already given, I embrace the second approach, so characterised, though I would prefer to think such an approach may sometimes be better described as radical, rather than conservative, insofar as it is based in the kinds of radical political critiques coming from feminist and anti-racist theory.

It may be worth considering this in terms of my discussion of methodological conservativeness in the first chapter of this thesis. As I discussed there, DePaul's radical reflective equilibrium is less methodologically conservative than his alternative, conservative reflective equilibrium, insofar as it undermines the privileged position of some particular moral conceptions by directing us to seek experiences that will challenge the naivete they are built on. However, under his liberal development of radical reflective equilibrium, this direction is guided by the individual's pre-existing (though subject to change) epistemological standards, which, as is

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28 Cf. Flikschuh (2014), p. 4
29 DePaul (1988), p. 171.

suggested by my discussion in the previous chapter, must also be understood as partly political and moral. On the alternative view of moral inquiry I want to present, this conservative element, the privileging of the particular moral/epistemological standards the agent brings to moral inquiry, is not present. However there is something else that DePaul would want to characterise as conservative: the role of *my* moral/epistemological standards, not as the person undergoing moral inquiry, but as the person recommending, perhaps to another, a methodology for moral inquiry. I do not believe that this need be conservative in the sense DePaul is worried about, insofar as the methodology is not designed to simply transmit a particular moral view that I, as the person recommending the methodology, have already worked out, nor does it rely on some teacher with a firm moral view simply transmitting that view to others.[30] Note in particular that the substantive moral/epistemological views that may underlie the recommendation of the methodology – such as taking epistemic injustice and epistemologies of ignorance seriously – are not *simply* those that the methodology is supposed to bring us to hold.

Ultimately, there is a limit to how fruitful discussion of DePaul's methodology can be here, insofar as I am not concerned with constructing a coherentist approach to moral methodology, not primarily concerned with the issue of first-personal rationality, and not inclined to orient my discussion of methodology around the basic structure of reflective equilibrium. This framing of the discussion limits him in a number of ways; for example, the picture he presents of seeking experiences that may lead to radical revisions in our moral views is rather limited, imagining a person who is naïve about something, conceives a few possible experiences that could challenge that naivete, and considers whether those experiences would be corrupting. This excludes some interesting, perhaps more common, but more difficult cases, such as the agent who is not simply naïve, but rather in the grip of distorting ideological commitments, that lead them to fundamentally misconceive moral reality. It also seems to exclude the possibility that the necessary transformative experiences may not be simply identifiable, or even conceivable, ahead of time.

For example, someone who held traditional ideas about the appropriate organisation of family life may have these ideas challenged by some experience of communal living. However, this person may have no idea of what exactly "communal living" could look like – indeed it might not determinately look like anything in particular before they try to create it - and they may not even be aware that any genuine alternatives to traditional family life *exist*. This shows that,

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30 These are the possible conservative elements DePaul seems to be worried about, see DePaul (1988), p.634.

contrary to DePaul's framing of the issues surrounding formative experiences, such experiences may shift people's moral views not just by filling in absences of knowledge, but also by working on their concepts, challenging entrenched or problematic ways of understanding the moral landscape. Again, DePaul fails to account for the way that individual moral beliefs are entrenched in a wider moral worldview, that may need to be challenged as a whole, rather than piecemeal.

Despite these limitations, I hope this discussion has helped establish, firstly, that contrary to the conservative forms of reflective equilibrium that DePaul criticises, which are perhaps dominant in moral philosophical practice, we need to make room for transformative experiences in moral inquiry, and, secondly, that we also need to discuss the question of exactly what kinds of experiences these may need to be, rather than simply leaving that question to the standards of individual moral theorists.[31] It is to this latter question that I turn for the remainder of this chapter.

MCKINNON AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF TRANS AWAKENING

Rachel McKinnon's paper "Trans*formative Experiences" provides a useful discussion of the epistemological benefits of one particular transformative experience, as she writes about the insights and improved moral consciousness that may come about due to trans awakening - the process by which a person comes to understand themself as trans, and as being other than the gender they were assigned at birth - and the related process of gender transition.[32] McKinnon argues that as a trans woman's particular social situatedness changes during the process of gender transition, she will gain some of the epistemic privilege which standpoint epistemologies attribute to marginalised social locations; she will gain privileged access to the standpoint of women. In particular, though a trans woman, before trans awakening or gender transition, may be aware of the existence of sexism and gender oppression, she will afterwards additionally gain some experience of "what it's like" to experience these harms. "Sexism stands out in a way it didn't before: being forced to struggle against implicit bias, stereotype threat, attributional ambiguity, harassment, and all the social ills disproportionately visited upon women has changed my epistemic access to how things are in the world."[33] She argues that these new experiences - particularly in combination with a previous awareness of what it is like to *not* be subject to these harms – will often lead to a feminist awakening for trans women.

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31 Ultimately me and DePaul may be agreeing on both points here, as he may concur that moral philosophy needs to include this discussion, while emphasising that philosophers will individualistically employ their existing epistemic standards to judge what to take from that discussion.
32 McKinnon (2015), "Trans*formative Experiences," *Res Philosophica* 92:2.
33 McKinnon (2015), p. 20.

Broadly speaking, I completely agree with McKinnon and her conclusions; trans awakening is a great example of a transformative experience, involving a change in situatedness, that can radically change the moral attitudes, and access to moral facts, for trans women who undergo it. However there are a number of small details I think it may be worthwhile to spell out, and to explore. Most of these relate to the question of how exactly we can understand the idea of a change in social situatedness. A puzzle derives from the fact, commonly (though not universally) expressed by trans women, and of some importance to transfeminism, that (at least some) trans women were women or girls[34] *before* transition, and *before* trans awakening.[35] That is, most trans women understand their transition not as a process of ceasing to be one gender and becoming another, but rather of attempting to shift the social perception and acknowledgement of their gender to match what it *actually* is.[36] This claim can be important for making sense of our experiences, for understanding how social forces have acted differently on us than on cis men,[37] and for helping explain the imperative to transition. The question, then, is how do we understand the change of social situatedness, and its relation to the standpoint epistemologies that McKinnon calls upon, given that in some sense membership in the relevant social category, 'woman,' has not changed.

Though McKinnon does not explicitly discuss this issue, or what exactly she understands a change in situatedness to be, she gives us the resources to deal with it. In particular, when introducing the notion of situatedness, she writes "Each person has a complicated intersectional identity, composed of various socially and biologically constructed factors. These factors include race, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, religious affiliation, nationality, and so on. These also include perceived versions of these statuses."[38] This

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34 Many discussions of trans experience speak only of "women" and "men," as though trans people never got to be children, and as though all trans people transition as adults. This seems particularly jarring in the face of the desperately problematic and bizarre "born a man" trope, which naturalises and essentialises the genders trans people were assigned at birth. That said, always speaking of "women or girls" does get tiresome, so, having highlighted this, I will also speak about "trans women," with this often being shorthand for "trans women or girls."

35 See Brighe (2014), "Please Stop Saying That Trans Women Were "Born Boys"", published on *Autostraddle*, September 29th, 2014, http://www.autostraddle.com/let-it-go-for-the-last-time-trans-women-were-not-born-boys-255055/

36 It is important to note that this claim is seperable from the decreasingly common claim that trans women have always *known* that they are women or girls, which McKinnon rightly suggests we reject as a standard trans narrative, McKinnon (2015), p. 12, fn. 18. Also note that by speaking of what someone's gender "actually" is I am not rejecting any kind of social constructionist account of gender.

37 On this point, see Millbank (2012), and Dentata (2014), "Nothing to Lose: Trans Women and Male Privilege," published at *amydentata.com*, February 18th, 2014, http://amydentata.com/2014/02/18/nothing-to-lose-trans-women-and-male-privilege/

38 McKinnon (2015), p. 15.

gives us room to identify three roughly distinct possible stages of a trans woman's identity:[39] 1) before trans awakening, being a woman who is not perceived as a woman, 2) after trans awakening, being a woman who is correctly perceived *by herself* to be a woman, and 3) through/after transition[40], being a woman who *may be* (when/if not being misgendered) correctly perceived by *others* to be a woman.[41] Each of these stages will involve distinct experiences, phenomenology, and epistemic effects.

Some of the examples McKinnon discusses, cases where she has experienced what it is like to suffer sexism, must be understood relative to the third stage. She gives the example of being repeatedly misunderstood by a speaker at a conference until her comment is repeated by a man.[42] This is an experience of being denied, due to sexism, a privilege that she had previously been provisionally afforded: the privilege of being granted the general assumption that what one says makes sense. So described, this is an experience that could only happen on the basis of her being perceived *by the speaker* to be a woman; or, at least, as other than a man. Similarly, she gives an example of being suddenly ignored and excluded from a conversation with two men[43], which looks to be a denial of the privilege of being granted the general assumption that what one says is important. Again, as McKinnon acknowledges, what triggered this event was not simply her being a woman, but also her being perceived by others to be a woman. Another example she discusses can be understood relative to the second stage: she talks about how her social location as a trans woman, and her attendant experiences with social and medical systems, put her in a position to notice that the language used by a particular cisgender male physician was oppressive.[44] The epistemic effect she discusses here came from her awareness of herself as trans, and the knowledge, experiences, and understanding that awareness gave her, as someone who struggles with cissexism. This effect did not rely on her being perceived by others to be a woman. Of course, this is an example of witnessing and understanding cissexism, rather than misogyny.

It may help to think through these issues by looking at another example, of an event that can be experienced, by a trans woman, in any of these stages, but will be experienced *differently*,

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39 We need not understand these stages as experienced linearly, or experienced and understood by every trans person in the same way; the distinctions I am making here are vast oversimplifications.
40 I am not entirely comfortable speaking of a time "after transition," as transition is a vague process with vague boundaries; in particular, being regularly gendered correctly should *not* be considered an endpoint or fundamental goal of transition for all trans women.
41 Not all trans woman will regularly or reliably experience this.
42 McKinnon (2015), p. 19.
43 McKinnon (2015), p. 27-8.
44 McKinnon (2015), p. 17.

with different epistemic effects, in each case. The example I have in mind is one very familiar to many women educated in academic philosophy - and one which McKinnon alludes to in her first example – the experience of being the only woman in the room. This is something that I have experienced at every stage of my participation in philosophy, though more frequently since becoming a graduate student. That is to say, I experienced this before trans awakening, after trans awakening, while still presenting a male facade, and after commencing transition, that is, after making some conscious effort to bring other people's perception of my gender in line with my actual gender. At each of these stages, the effects on me of those instances where I was the only woman in the room was different.

Before trans awakening I had experiences of being the only woman in the room, but would understand these experiences, when I noticed them, as being ones where "there are no women in this room." Such experiences did give me, and would give others in similar circumstances, some awareness of something of the form *what it is like to be the only woman in the room*. In particular, they gave me awareness of this *as* experienced by a woman with a particular intersectional identity: that of a trans woman, or more specifically a trans woman who lacked a certain self-understanding. The effects on me of these experiences were oppressive, and in ways that implicate sexism: for example, they led me to (more deeply) internalise such ideas as that philosophy is not an appropriate or felicitous activity for women and that women don't belong in these spaces, and they facilitated my self-denial as a trans woman through the idea that my progress and continued presence in such a clearly masculine space was incompatible with my being other than a man. Despite this, my epistemic position in relation to these experiences was extremely weak; though I had something like an awareness of *what it is like to be the only woman in the room*, I was clearly not in any kind of position to do much with this awareness, not in a position to turn it into any kind of useful or liberatory knowledge.

After trans awakening, my experience of what was in some significant sense *the same type of event*, being the only woman in the room, changed. At this point I could understand my experience in precisely those terms, and I acutely felt certain negative effects, in particular a sense of isolation and loneliness, and feelings of being an imposter within philosophy, as it was implicitly presenting itself as a masculine space. I also felt a heightened awareness of my own gender, and its mismatch with the culture expressed by others in the room as well as my own presentation, and had to contend with anxieties around the possibility of transition while remaining in such a space. At this

point I was better able to *understand*, as McKinnon puts it, "what it felt like to inhabit a world of structural oppression."[45] For example, though I could guess before that experiencing oneself as being the only woman in a philosophical room might make one feel uncomfortable and like an outsider, only after trans awakening, and experiencing these feelings while in a position to understand them, did I start to see how these facts could help create a philosophical climate which would tend to drive women away from the discipline, perpetuating the problem. That is, only then did I start to understand the problem as structural and political, rather than merely unfortunate. It is not that this kind of understanding was in principle barred from me beforehand, but simply that I did not have the same kind of motivations and vantage-point to develop this understanding myself.

And again, my experiences were different after commencing transition, after making some effort to have my gender correctly recognised by others. Though I have avoided the kind of direct, obvious epistemic injustices that McKinnon talks about (mostly though not saying much at all), I again experienced a heightened sense of difference and unbelonging[46]; sometimes an attitude of assertive belligerence was needed to enter and remain in such spaces, as both openly trans and a woman. I felt aware of myself as a kind of singular representative of womanhood in such spaces, which triggered the stress and anxiety that comes with stereotype threat.[47] Similarly, I experienced an anxiety about how I occupied that space *as a woman* – how I dressed, how I behaved, etc – in a context where there were few other exemplars to relate to, and in the position of an openly trans woman, whose very womanhood is subject to question by cisnormative understandings of gender. On those occasions when I was one of two women in the room, I would wonder whether my feelings of solidarity with her were reciprocated.

The point of working through this extended example is to suggest that there is something missing if we understand the epistemic advantage that is gained through gender transition *simply* in terms of gaining *what it's like* experiences. There is *some* sense in which a trans woman's social location, as a trans woman, is unchanged through transition, and in this sense she will have experiences of what it's like to be a woman even well before trans awakening. Certainly the content of these experiences will change radically after awakening, but this is consistent with the fact that

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45 McKinnon (2015), p. 20.
46 The BPA/SWIP report on women in philosophy in the UK occasionally discusses the effect of being the only woman in a roomful of men, noting how it contributes to feelings of isolating, being an outsider, and shyness. Beebee & Saul (2011), "Women in Philosophy in the UK," p. 16.
47 See Beebee & Saul (2011), p. 13. McKinnon has also discussed the particular influence of stereotype threat on trans women, McKinnon (2014), "Stereotype Threat and Attributional Ambiguity for Trans Women," *Hypatia* 29:4.

what it's like to be a woman is different for different women in different circumstances and, particularly, with different intersectional social locations, such as that of being both a woman and trans. To reiterate, that a trans woman's distinctive experience may be shared by no cis women makes it no less an experience of what it is like to be a woman; this judgement goes along with our rejection of essentialism. Of course, we could point out that before transition, most trans women have (probably) not had the particular *what it's like* experiences of suffering professional sexual harassment or sexist implicit bias, and so such women would be in a worse position to understand these *particular* wrongs. But while it is true, this answer fails to address the particular question of why, despite having had some *what it's like* experiences of being a woman before trans awakening, nonetheless before awakening a trans woman is in a *much* worse position for being able to understand and make sense of even these experiences. So, we need to ask, what in particular about trans awakening or transition brings about not just new experiences, but also new potential for understanding those experiences.

McKinnon takes us some way towards an answer as she talks about "struggle." Her claim is that "being forced to struggle against implicit bias, stereotype threat, attributional ambiguity, harassment, and all the social ills disproportionately visited upon women has changed my epistemic access to how things are in the world."[48] She specifically notes that, while knowledge that these things happen is available to cis men, it is *struggling* with these things that brings epistemic advantage. However, there is an ambiguity in the word "struggle." On the one hand it may simply refer to suffering, experiencing something while being harmed by it. Suffering may be an important concept for feminist epistemology[49], but it doesn't get us quite what we need here. Though, before trans awakening, a trans woman may not have suffered from these particular social ills - implicit bias, stereotype threat, etc – she nonetheless will have experienced, and in one way or another suffered from, and struggled with, a number of social ills which characteristically effect women, such as the internalisation of oppressive sex roles, or restrictive beauty norms.[50] This (passive) form of struggle is manifestly not sufficient to bring about improved understanding.

On the other hand, we may understand struggle in a more active sense, perhaps as

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48 McKinnon (2015), p. 20.
49 See Jaggar (1983), p. 370.
50 To head off misunderstanding, I am not suggesting that male sex roles are oppressive, but rather that a trans girl is liable to internalise female sex roles as applying to herself, if only in some inchoate way, and suffer from these in a similar way to cis girls. For more on how sex roles may be internalised by trans girls and women, see Millbank (2012).

struggling *against* rather than struggling with.[51] As I discussed in the previous chapter, standpoint epistemologists have highlighted the importance of *political* struggle for creating the standpoint from which an undistorted view of the world can be achieved. This point was particularly pressed by Hartsock, who insists that a standpoint must be "interested in the sense of being engaged,"[52] but also by Jaggar, who, acknowledging the importance of suffering for standpoint epistemology, also noted that we must go beyond, and perhaps redescribe women's experience, and that this is accomplished through "scientific and political struggle."[53] Including some amount of active engagement among what is required to achieve the epistemic advantage one might gain from occupying a particular social location is important precisely for showing why mere *what it's like* experience is not sufficient to bring about greater knowledge.

This also helps to explain why after trans awakening, a trans woman is in a better position to derive some epistemic advantage from the *what it's like* experiences that she has had, and the new experiences that she will go on to have. Even if she was previously aware of feminist concepts, only after coming to understand herself as a woman is she is a position to understand those experiences she has had as the experiences *of* a woman under patriarchy. This also puts her in a position to, in some sense, challenge or rail against those experiences. Some process of reinterpreting past events in light of a new self-understanding is a fairly common aspect of trans experience, often taking place soon after, or perhaps as part of the process of, trans awakening. This phenomena is not entirely distinct from a process undergone by cis women coming to feminism, as Hartsock notes: "We came to understand our experiences, our past, in a way that transformed our experience and ourselves."[54]

This is a process which social and political forces, most obviously the gatekeepers who govern access to medical care for many trans people, have attempted to control.[55] Though this practice is thankfully dying down, it continues, to some degree, to be expected of trans women that they construct a personal narrative, a new life history in terms that do not challenge either traditional gender ideology, or cisnormativity. Refusal to express an anti-feminist interpretation of

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51 McKinnon uses both of these locutions at different points. She specifically mentions the non-passive element of struggle at McKinnon (2015), p. 18.
52 Hartsock (1983), p. 285.
53 Jaggar (1983), p. 384
54 Hartsock (1979) "Feminist Theory and the Development of Revolutionary Strategy," in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* ed. Eisenstein (Monthly Review Press: New York), p. 59.
55 See Stone (1987) "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," available at http://sandystone.com/empire-strikes-back.pdf, p. 12-13. For a lot more on gatekeeping, see Serano (2007), particularly chapter 7.

one's own history can result in treatment being withheld.[56] Even outside the medical context, we can understand how the need to make our genders understood and respected by family and friends, who may be in the grip of sexist and cisnormative ideas, will exert an influence *against* the adoption of anything that may be considered a liberatory feminist or trans standpoint. In this context, we can see how the need to develop an interpretation of our histories in a way that does *not* do violence to our experiences can be understood as a political struggle; even while much of the act of reinterpretation goes on in our heads, a kind of private battle against the influence of ideology, it manifests externally as we work to be understood and respected by others. This struggle attempts to change our relationship to others, and to change the world, by challenging their cisnormative attitudes.

For many trans women, particularly those early in some process of transition, simply being themselves in the world is a struggle, in the sense of being a political act. To be seen, to assert one's identity against a frequently hostile world, requires in some way acting against, resisting, and challenging the ideologies which say that we *cannot be* like *this*. Though it is often a lonely process, it is inevitably done against a background of continuing trans and feminist movement, a history of political struggle which has set the ground for the self-understanding and, to some degree, material conditions that make transition easier, or even possible. In this way, even with a distinctively political understanding of struggle, we can understand McKinnon's repeated claim that transition "*forces* one... to struggle with the world in ways one hadn't before."[57]

Similarly, to some extent a trans woman who encounters such things is "*forced* to struggle against implicit bias, stereotype threat, attributional ambiguity, [and] harassment,"[58] not just because she now experiences these things – many women through history have encountered sexism without struggling against it in quite the form Hartsock and other standpoint epistemologists have discussed - but because of the particular experience of witnessing a *loss* of privileges and freedoms that she had previously enjoyed.[59] To be sure, this struggle may not result in the successful creation or adoption of a liberatory feminist standpoint; trans women are also prone to internalised sexism and transmisogyny.[60] Nonetheless, this helps explain the apparently high proportion of trans women who identify as feminists, and why "transition is often (though

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56 See Millbank (2012).
57 McKinnon (2015), p. 18, emphasis mine.
58 McKinnon (2015), p. 20, emphasis mine.
59 See McKinnon (2015), p. 20-21.
60 See Millbank (2011) on the complicated relationship trans women may have to street harassment.

certainly not always) closely followed by some form of a 'feminist awakening.'"[61]

In discussing the epistemic ramifications of trans awakening and gender transition, McKinnon has provided us with a great example of a transformative experience that can bring about immense epistemic benefits, of use to moral theory. However, for the purposes of this thesis there is something limiting about this example: if we are concerned with identifying what kinds of experiences a moral philosopher might seek to go through in order to improve their ability to do moral philosophy, gender transition is obviously not a great example. Those for whom transition is a viable option – trans women, men, and non-binary folks who have not yet transitioned – certainly should consider it, though presumably not primarily for the reason of improving their ability to do moral philosophy. But such a change is certainly not recommendable, and perhaps not entirely coherent, for cis people. The more general prospect of seeking epistemic benefit through changing one's social location also seems unlikely, for reasons McKinnon discusses with reference to John Howard Griffin's book *Black Like Me*,[62] which come down to the difficulty, perhaps impossibility, of entirely shifting social location in certain ways. So, we are left needing to identify some kind of transformative experience which is potentially open to anyone, which can be sought after and recommended as a general method, and which gives us epistemic benefits not unlike those a trans woman may gain through trans awakening. I will now try to identify such an experience through an exploration of the idea of feminist awakening.

FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS AND PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

In her early exploration of the phenomenology of coming to feminist consciousness, Sandra Lee Bartky wrote:

> To be a feminist, one has first to become one. For many feminists, this involves the experience of a profound personal transformation, an experience which goes far beyond the sphere of human activity we regard ordinarily as "political." This transforming experience, which cuts across the ideological division within the women's movement, is complex and multifaceted. In the course of undergoing the transformation to which I refer, the feminist changes her *behaviour*... These changes in behaviour go hand in hand with changes in *consciousness*: to become a feminist is to develop a radically altered consciousness of oneself, of others, and of what, for lack of a better term, I shall call "social reality"[63]

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61 McKinnon (2015), p. 27.
62 McKinnon (2015), p. 22-25.
63 Bartky (1990), p. 11.

Though Bartky wrote this in the early 70s, in the early days of the second wave of women's movement, this phenomenon continues to manifest. Though basic conditions for women have improved in a number of ways, nonetheless coming to awareness of some of the deeper, more pervasive and ideological feminist issues, such as rape culture, or the systematic devaluation of women and whatever is classed as feminine, still often goes along with a significant transformative experience much like the one described in Bartky's paper. Fischer has noted that such accounts "are remarkably similar across the generations."[64]

In discussing this kind of change, I will tend to speak of a woman coming to feminism, as this is the central, and most discussed case.[65] However, the process of a man, or a person of any other gender coming to be a feminist will probably share many similarities.[66] Further, in discussing this kind of transformation I do not mean to be presenting any kind of universal account, and the discussions I draw upon here (and my own experiences) tend to relate to anglophone women, mostly white women, coming to feminist consciousness in the context of an established or emerging women's movement. Additionally, though my discussion focuses on feminist consciousness, I do not mean to suggest that this is the only, or the most valuable form of political consciousness, and much of what I say may relate to other forms of political consciousness, such as that gained through anti-racist or anti-capitalist movements.

Becoming a feminist is not simply a matter of coming to know new things. It does not just involve coming to believe something like a set of feminist propositions. Rather, "feminist consciousness suddenly encompasses every aspect of one's life. Thus, one feels like one's very self has been replaced by another self, like a feminist self has taken the seat of a prefeminist self, changing one's perception of everything formerly taken for granted as 'normal.'"[67] Most obvious here is the change in perception. Someone's becoming a feminist will involve her interpreting things differently; perhaps where she once saw a casual remark, she will now see a sexist comment, perhaps where she once took a comment from a stranger in the street as complimentary or innocent, she will now understand it to be threatening and controlling. Many ordinary interactions and cultural objects will come to seem particularly gendered. An early sociological

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64 Fischer (2014) *Gendered Readings of Change: A Feminist-Pragmatist Approach* (Palgrave Macmillian: New York), p. 122.

65 Some have even questioned whether a man *can* be a feminist, or whether they could only ever be an ally. I tend towards the more inclusive notion of "feminist" and will employ it in this thesis.

66 bell hooks often stresses the importance of feminist consciousness among men in hooks (2000), *Feminism Is For Everybody* (South End Press: Cambridge).

67 Fischer (2014), p. 123.

study revealed that "Feminists are more likely to use a feminist vocabulary of motives, introduce the general theme of sexism or specific feminist themes such as job discrimination... Feminists interject feminism into their interpretation of everyday life and perceive situations differently from nonfeminists".[68] The moral dimension of this new way of seeing is obvious; as Minnie Bruce Pratt described her own change of consciousness, "I became obsessed with justice".[69]

Bartky wrote "Feminists are not more aware of different things than other people; they are aware of the same things differently."[70] However this doesn't seem quite right. There will also be a change in the kinds of things a feminist notices, in what is salient. Certainly the nonfeminist and the feminist may both see the sexist billboard, and will both be effected by its sexism, though they will interpret it differently. However, where the nonfeminist may ignore the billboard, think of it as unremarkable, and be unable to recall it later in the day, the feminist may have her eye drawn to it, be outraged by it, talk about it and keep it fresh in her mind. Further changes in what one is aware of will come along with behavioural changes: a feminist may be motivated to attend a Reclaim The Night march, where she becomes aware of the existence of police harassment against sex workers, while the nonfeminist simply never hears of this. This may in turn lead the feminist to be more aware of police presence on the streets in her daily life.

One of the deepest and most personally important changes that can come with feminist consciousness is a change in attitudes and values. Central to being is a feminist is not just seeing sexism, but also hating it. Feminists may come to dislike what they previously liked; as a simple example, a friend of mine commented that since becoming aware of feminism, she could no longer enjoy most stand-up comedy.[71] Feminists may come to love what they have previously been unable to; a small study of women coming to feminism in the 70s found "In the process of acquiring a new image and identity, women establish friendships with each other. For some women, it is the first time in their lives that they have had other women as friends."[72] As feminists struggle to resist internalised sexism which casts other women in patriarchal terms, or as rivals, more positive attitudes can develop. The attitudes a feminist has towards herself may also improve, as "we are

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68 Green (1979), "The Feminist Consciousness," *The Sociological Quarterly* 20:3, p. 359.
69 Pratt (1984), "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," in *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism*, Bulkin, Pratt & Smith (Long Haul Press: New York).
70 Bartky (1990), p. 14.
71 Relatedly, see Sukan (2015), "How I became a feminist: My origin story and the importance of meltdowns," published at Medium.com, https://medium.com/@idilsukan/how-i-became-a-feminist-my-origin-story-and-my-latest-public-meltdown-807cfa8acf71
72 Acker & Howard (1972), "Societal and Familial Supports in the Development of Feminists," *Education Resources Information Center*, ED 072-379, p. 20.

no longer required to struggle against unreal enemies, to put others' interests ahead of our own, or to hate ourselves."[73]

Changes in the feminist's perception and attitudes go along with changes in behaviour, some as minor as attending a protest or changing how she shops, some as major as leaving a marriage or setting up a women's shelter. "It was common for women in consciousness-raising groups to share radical changes in members' lives, relationships, work, life goals, and sexuality."[74] In particular, there is a "transformation of day-to-day living into a series of invitations to struggle".[75] These changes are oriented both towards personal improvement – finding ways of living that are more in the interest of ourselves and other women – and towards political improvement. The changes in behaviour feed into further epistemological changes, as the feminist is exposed to experiences, testimony, and ways of life that she would've missed if she had continued as before.

Becoming a feminist also involves a change in relationships. Most obviously, the feminist may gain new friendships or a greater closeness with those who share feminist concerns, and may alienate or separate herself from those whose sexism is blatant or intransigent. More generally, the nature of her relationships will change. She will attempt to remove herself from, or change the structure of, relationships of domination and control – or, at least, non-consensual ones. She will aim to create closer, more cooperative relationships with other women.

The process of coming to feminist consciousness is often described as sudden, happening all at once, and triggered by a single identifiable event. It "is usually related in epiphanous terms, as an "aha"-moment, a sudden, all consuming revelation."[76] It is frequently characterised, like trans emergence, as an 'awakening,' a dramatic shift to a new way of being, a move "from unconscious to conscious."[77] The particular events usually credited for triggering a feminist awakening tend to involve exposure to the feminist movement (particularly, in the 70s, through consciousness raising groups,[78] more recently through the internet and social media), an egregious experience of sexism, or a related experience such as coming out as a lesbian or as trans. For example, Lindy West identifies a pivotal moment when she was presented with a simple definition of feminism by a

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73 Bartky (1990), p. 21.
74 MacKinnon (1989), p. 91.
75 Bartky (1990), p. 20.
76 Fischer (2014), p. 122.
77 Fischer (2014), p. 123.
78 hooks noted that "Fundamentally, the consciousness-raising (CR) group was a site for conversion," hooks (2000), p. 8.

university lecturer[79]. bell hooks wrote "My own conversion to feminist thinking in my teenage years was in direct response to my father's domination of everyone in our household."[80] Cherríe Moraga recalled "It wasn't until I acknowledged and confronted my own lesbianism in the flesh, that my heartfelt identification with and empathy for my mother's oppression - due to being poor, uneducated, and Chicana — was realized. My lesbianism is the avenue through which I have learned the most about silence and oppression, and it continues to be a tactile reminder to me that we are not free human beings."[81]

However, this idea of a sudden transformation triggered by a particular event may be significantly more common among white, middle-class feminists, as suggested in a discussion between Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith, "Across the Kitchen Table."[82] Barbara Smith points out a difference in politics between women "who come to a realization that oppression exists say at 22, 25, or even 18, versus Black women's and other women of color's perspective, which is that your oppression is a lifelong thing."[83] Beverly Smith notes that white women seem to come to feminist much more often through an academic or intellectual route, rather than through personal experience, and adds "They still talk about when you have an experience that makes you realize your oppression as a women, makes you realize other women's oppression, you know, some revealing incident in your life as a woman. That is a 'click.' Well I mean, I guess there are 'clicks' among racial lines, but the thing is they're so far back in terms of class that they're almost imperceptible. It just feels to me like it's a different kind of thing."[84]

The phenomenology of feminist consciousness is often characterised as difficult or painful, but tends to be characterised as nonetheless worthwhile. Bartky argues in some depth that "feminist consciousness, in large measure, is an anguished consciousness".[85] Feminist women become divided by the contradictions they begin to see in society, and by the tensions in understanding themselves as simultaneously victims, resisters, and, sometimes, oppressors.[86] They may suffer confusion and guilt from an awareness of their own role in perpetuating oppression.[87]

79 West (2015), "Herland: the forgotten feminist classic about a civilisation without men," published in The Guardian, Monday 30th March 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/mar/30/herland-forgotten-feminist-classic-about-civilisation-without-men
80 hooks (2000), p. 100-101.
81 Moraga (1983), "La Güera", in *This Bridge Called My Back*, Moraga & Anzaldúa eds. (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press: New York), p. 23.
82 Smith & Smith (1983), "Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue," in Moraga & Anzaldúa (1983).
83 Smith & Smith (1983), p. 112.
84 Smith & Smith (1983), p. 112-113.
85 Bartky (1990), p. 14.
86 Bartky (1990), p. 16.
87 Bartky (1990), p. 16.

They are isolated and frustrated by the difficulty of communicating their anger and outrage to others.[88] They are rendered paranoid and hypervigilant from the knowledge that they "can be attacked almost anywhere, at any time, by virtually anyone."[89] They are "often afflicted with category confusion, an inability to know how to classify things,"[90] for example whether as sexist or innocent, accidental or malicious. They also suffer an ethical crisis, being constantly aware of potential harms and opportunities for struggle, facing self-doubt and shame when they inevitably let some go.[91] Feminists labour under a certain kind of epistemological difficulty; not so much a difficulty in coming to know, but rather with living with what they know, making sense of an obviously confusing and hostile world, and managing the increasingly apparent ignorance, of themselves and of others.

By contrast, pre-feminist consciousness may be, epistemologically, simpler and easier, albeit flawed, and often materially more difficult; most injustices are hidden behind an epistemology of ignorance, and those that we see are easily explained in terms of the dominant ideology, as natural or desirable. Nonetheless, this pre-feminist consciousness carries an element of repression, of self-stifling. As such, coming to feminist consciousness is experienced as desirable and liberatory: "We are no longer required to struggle against unreal enemies, to put others' interests ahead of our own, or to hate ourselves... No longer do we have to practice upon ourselves that mutilation of intellect and personality required of individuals who, caught up in an irrational and destructive system, are nevertheless not allowed to regard it as anything but sane, progressive, and normal."[92]

Recently, Fischer has questioned what we can take from this phenomenology. Though she grants that "coming to feminist consciousness is often experienced as a sudden epiphany,"[93] she argues that, nonetheless, "the transforming experience of coming to feminist consciousness is protracted and extended."[94] Her reasons for this are mostly based on the observation that the doubt and unease which manifest in feminist awakening may exist, below awareness, in a person from a very young age. Her picture of coming to feminist consciousness looks like this: as a woman or girl lives in an oppressive system, she gains a sense that things do not fit right, a sense of contradiction, and begin to incorporate doubt into her life. Often this doubt is self-directed; she

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88 Bartky (1990), p. 17.
89 Bartky (1990), p. 17.
90 Bartky (1990), p. 18. See also McKinnon (2014).
91 Bartky (1990), p. 19-20.
92 Bartky (1990), p. 21. This would also, non-coincidentally, describe the phenomenology of trans awakening.
93 Fischer (2014), p. 136.
94 Fischer (2014), p. 138.

recognises the lack of fit between herself and the patriarchal ideals of her society, but instead of doubting society, instead she doubts herself, and this doubt manifests in behaviours such as eating disorders. However, at some point her consciousness may begin to be raised, so she "comes to realize what she should be doubting [and] directs doubt towards the causes of her existential contradictions".[95] As MacKinnon puts it, consciousness raising "redefines women's feelings of discontent as indigenous to their situation rather than to themselves as crazy, maladjusted, hormonally imbalanced, bitchy, or ungrateful."[96] Similarly, the Combahee River Collective noted "Black feminists often talk about their feelings of craziness before becoming concious of the concepts of sexual politics, patriarchal rule, and most importantly, feminism – the political analysis and practice that we women use to struggle against our oppression."[97]

This change, coupled with feminist insights and entry into a feminist community which helps her to acquire and develop new, anti-sexist habits, brings the feminist new knowledge and certainty, easing her confusion and sense of doubt. In contrast to Bartky, Fischer characterises feminist consciousness as a relatively peaceful and self-assured state, where we can be confident in new-found certainties, and where doubts are firmly directed towards society rather than the self.

Though there is much of value in Fischer's account, we may still question some elements. Regarding the abruptness of feminist awakening, it's not clear how much hangs on this. It is certainly valuable to identify a history of doubt and questioning behind the eventual attainment of feminist consciousness; no one would deny that individual feminists may have a history, in patriarchal society, which makes them particularly drawn to and receptive of feminist insights. As Fischer agrees with Bartky that awakening may be triggered by particular discrete events, and that at some point "feminist consciousness *suddenly* encompasses every aspect of one's life,"[98] it's not clear what substantive difference there would be in characterising feminist awakening as a protracted process, or rather identifying it entirely with the particular moment when we gain feminist insights, and begin to direct doubt towards society. Perhaps one advantage is that understanding coming to feminist consciousness as a protracted process would discourage a particularly idealised view of the process, one where a single transformative event radically and *comprehensively* transforms us into a person who has basically all the right beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, or the personal resources to develop these – an idealisation we may read into Bartky's

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95 Fischer (2014), p. 138.
96 MacKinnon (1989), p. 100.
97 Combahee River Collective (1983), "A Black Feminist Statement," in Moraga & Anzaldúa (1983).
98 Fischer (2014), p. 123, emphasis mine.

claim that "consciousness of victimization is immediate and revelatory; it allows us to discover what social reality is really like."[99] However, we could reject this idealisation while still identifying awakening as a sudden process, so long as we keep in mind that no one single event of personal transformation can be expected to do all the epistemic work we expect of transformative experiences.

On the other hand, I think we should be very wary of Fischer's rejection of the idea that feminist consciousness is an anguished consciousness. In emphasising the certainty that is to be gained from feminist awareness, and downplaying the increased sense of doubt, confusion and alienation, we risk a dangerous complacency and self-assurance. Bartky explicitly links the anguished and divided nature of feminist consciousness to racism, noting that those who fail to develop such a divided consciousness "remain blind to the extent to which they themselves are implicated in the victimization of others."[100] As I concluded in the previous chapter, we should be very worried about any methodology that claims to *resolve* our self-doubt, or bring us a kind of comfortable epistemic mastery. The danger here is all too real. There are many forms of feminism, and some seem to be oriented largely around attempting to promote the rights and welfare of *some* women by trampling on those of other, less privileged women.

For example, many white U.S. suffragettes explicitly employed racism to argue in favour of votes for white women,[101] racism was rife in the consciousness raising groups and feminist seperatist movements of the 1970s, and persists particularly in the form of "Carceral Feminism," a mainstream feminist tendency which seeks to deploy the fundamentally racist and classist of policing and incarceration in order to solve feminist problems.[102] Similarly, there are forms of feminism which are deeply hostile to trans women, and (related) forms which attempt to eliminate sex work through methods that have been proved to harm individual women involved in sex work. Though there is a lot going on to sustain these forms of feminism, and their existence definitely cannot be reduced to the particular educational path of individual feminists, I would like to suggest that these forms of feminism are marked by a lack of epistemic humility. Such feminists believe that have found a solution to misogyny, without taking the further, less comfortable step towards recognising their own possible involvement in racism, transphobia, and stigmatisation of

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99 Bartky (1990), p. 16.
100 Bartky (1990), p. 16.
101 See Ortberg (2014), "Suffragettes Who Sucked: White Supremacy and Women's Rights," *The Toast*, April 21, 2014,
        http://the-toast.net/2014/04/21/suffragettes-sucked-white-supremacy-womens-rights/
102 See Law (2014), "Against Carceral Feminism," *Jacobin*, October 17, 2014,
        https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/10/against-carceral-feminism/

sex workers, and recognising their own limitations when it comes to understanding forms of oppression that they privilege from, rather than suffer from.

Both these points are well illustrated by Minnie Bruce Pratt's autobiographical essay "Identity: Skin Blood Heart." Here, Pratt tells a story of her own political development from a sheltered white girl growing up in a racist society, in the south of the United States, to a lesbian feminist with increased consciousness of racial oppression and resistance. While her essay reveals a lot about feminist consciousness, it is notably different to many other, less personal accounts of becoming a feminist in that it avoids the universalisation these accounts often suffer from. Many of the white feminist writers I have mentioned present their account of feminist consciousness as though it must apply to every woman who becomes a feminist, and, as I will discuss later, this universality has been rejected by some feminists of colour. On the other hand, Pratt, who is explicitly concerned with racism in the feminist movement, does not suggest that the process she describes is how *every* feminist develops politically, but is rather just presenting her own story in order to illuminate how one may become aware of sexist and racist oppression.

Another striking feature of Pratt's essay, in contrast to many other, narrower accounts of coming to feminist consciousness, is that it does not focus on a single transformative event, inflating the difference in consciousness before and after a single revelation. Rather, Pratt describes a number of events through her life, each of which transformed her in quite dramatic, but limited ways. She portrays herself not as one who has 'seen the light,' who is always in a position to easily know anything, or to simply find out. Rather, she describes a lengthy, exhausting, and continuing process of "moving from the experience of the 'unknowing majority' (as Maya Angelou has called it) into consciousness."[103]

The transformative experiences Pratt describes are spread across much of her life, and each involves a dramatic change in attitudes, behaviour, beliefs and circumstances, consistent with how feminist awakening is often characterised. These experiences include membership in a consciousness raising group,[104] leaving her hometown and "living in a place where I was conscious of being afraid because I was a *woman*,"[105] meeting a feminist who acknowledged and applauded her,[106] having her children taken from her by a judge's decision,[107] and hearing of a local attack by

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103 Pratt (1984), p. 29.
104 Pratt (1984), p. 42.
105 Pratt (1984), p. 39.
106 Pratt (1984), p. 41.
107 Pratt (1984), p. 43.

the Ku Klux Klan on an anti-Klan demonstration.[108] Each of these experiences contributed to a growing awareness: leaving her hometown helped her "to understand that women are used as sexual pets, or are violently abused, are considered sexual prey … at the mercy of another class, *men*."[109] The Klan attack led her to realise how racism was so often exercised in her name, in the name of protecting white women, which led her to research her own family's role in white supremacy.

Despite these many individual experiences, Pratt describes one perhaps central experience, which culminated from or partially caused many of the others. To answer how she began to change, she writes "I began when I jumped from my edge and outside myself, into radical change, for love – simply love – for myself and for other women. I acted on that love by becoming a lesbian, falling in love with and becoming sexual with a particular woman; and this love led me directly, but by a complicated way, to work against racism and anti-Semitism. … It was my joy at loving another woman, the risks I took by doing so, the changes this brought me to, and the losses, that broke through the bubble of skin and class privilege around me."[110]

In taking this particular experience, of coming out as a lesbian, to be pivotal, we gain a sense of how powerful and momentous a transformative experience may be, but we need not return to idealising such experiences. Many of the changes and revelations Pratt describes occurred before she became a lesbian, and she is also explicit in describing events *after* this change where she continued to act with ignorance, racism and anti-Semitism.[111] Nonetheless, becoming a lesbian was, for Pratt, not just one change among many others, but was rather pivotal as an expression of the love for and identification with women that was involved in her progress towards feminist consciousness, and as it directly led to further transformative experiences, due to her permanent loss of the protective privileges of assumed heterosexuality, and her subsequent involvement in the women's movement.

This cascading effect should be expected of the kinds of transformative experiences I am discussing, as the changes in behaviour and epistemology that they bring will tend to encourage further novel experiences. This, along with the tight connections between forms of oppression suggested by intersectionality, should give us some reason to pause before assuming we can simply identify any particular experience as one of coming to *feminist* consciousness, rather than

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108 Pratt (1984), p. 51.
109 Pratt (1984), p. 39.
110 Pratt (1984), p. 36-37.
111 Pratt (1984), p. 47-50.

any other, or broader, anti-oppressive consciousness. However it is also worth considering how this cascading effect could be blocked; a significant element in Pratt's narrative is the immense loss of privilege and protection that accompanied her coming out, and the devastating removal of her children. If an individual were protected from such events (perhaps by other privileges), and resisted any wider personal changes, then even a dramatic transformative experience may have a more limited effect.

Relatedly, Pratt's narrative also highlights the difficulty involved in living with feminist consciousness, as she metaphorically characterises the process of coming to feminist consciousness as 'leaving home', which involves losing comfort, familiarity and safety, albeit a safety that is conditional on acquiescence with white supremacy and compulsory heterosexual. She explicitly connects this difficulty to her increased consciousness, as a white woman, of racial oppression. While she felt her expanding consciousness of her own oppression "as painful but ultimately positive," breaking through to an understanding of racial oppression was more difficult: "Because I was implicated in the doing of some of these injustices, myself and my people, I felt in a struggle with myself, *against* myself. This breaking through did not feel like liberation but like destruction."[112] She stresses that expanding political consciousness involves loss, because "the old lies and ways of living - habitual, familiar, comfortable, fitting us like our skin - *were* ours."[113] Of course, it also involves gains, as we "learn a way of looking at the world that is more accurate, complex, multilayered, multidimensioned, more truthful,"[114] and can develop a new sense of self-respect.[115]

This characterisation of feminist consciousness as 'leaving home' is not uncommon; it also appears in the work of Teresa de Lauretis, who describes feminist consciousness as "a displacement and a self-displacement: leaving or giving up a place that is safe, that is 'home' - physically, emotionally, linguistically, epistemologically - for another place that is unknown and risky, that is not only emotionally but conceptually other; a place of discourse from which speaking and thinking are at best tentative, uncertain, unguaranteed. But the leaving is not a choice: one could not live there in the first place."[116]

On the other hand, again this experience seems particular to middle-class white feminists,

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112 Pratt (1984), p. 53. Emphasis hers.
113 Pratt (1984), p. 56. Emphasis hers.
114 Pratt (1984), p. 33.
115 Pratt (1984), p. 60.
116 de Lauretis (1990), "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness," *Feminist Studies* 16:1 p. 138.

as Barbara Smith points out "The thing that's different about women's oppression is that you can be white and middle class and female and live a so-called "nice" life up until a certain point, then you begin to notice these 'clicks,' but I think the quality of life for the upper or middle class white woman is so far ahead of the quality of life for the Black person, the Black child, the working class child or the poor child."[117] The narratives presented by Pratt and de Lauretis involve leaving a safe, pre-political home, a conditionally livable space. However, women of color who have suffered from "constant physical and material oppression,"[118] lifelong and extreme, may have no such starting point, no physical and emotional space which is even conditionally tolerable. Still, this need not mean that the kind of political consciousness attained by women of color will be less difficult than that of white women, but rather that the process of coming to this consciousness will often take place earlier, be more fluid, and may be experienced as more obviously a positive change overall.

Again, I believe we should be concerned about any account of feminist consciousness, especially from relatively privileged white feminists, that does not include this element of anguish. It is not so much that such account are *wrong*, that feminist consciousness cannot be experienced as *overwhelmingly* positive and liberatory, but rather that something seems dangerously absent when feminist consciousness is presented simply as a relief, as a confident freedom from self-doubt. Pratt stresses the importance, for her consciousness of racism, of admitting that "there are things that I *do not know* - an admission hard on my pride, and harder to do than it sounds".[119] I have already discussed how something like the failure to make this difficult further step towards doubt may lead to involvement in particular oppressive forms of feminism.

Another important element in Pratt's narrative is that, despite the importance of distinct transformative experiences, these are not presented as simple, *complete* solutions, even to limited problems. Rather, these transformations are accompanied by, and actually prompt, other epistemological methods, such as consciousness raising,[120] political organisation,[121] self scrutiny,[122] and basic research; as when Pratt researches the history of Black resistance, and her own family's involvement in slavery and oppression,[123] as well as the acts of resistance to racial oppression

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117 Smith & Smith (1979), p. 113.
118 Smith & Smith (1979), p. 113.
119 Pratt (1984), p. 59. Cf. Sholock (2012).
120 Pratt (1984), p. 42.
121 Pratt (1984), p. 47-51.
122 Pratt (1984), p. 52.
123 Pratt (1984), p. 51-52.

carried out by Southern white women like herself.[124] Of particular importance, Pratt advocates a methodology of listening: "I have to struggle to remember that I don't rule the world with my thoughts and actions like some judge in a tilt-back chair; and that by *listening* to criticisms, not talking back but listening, I may learn how I might have been acting or thinking like one of the old powers-that-be."[125]

Bartky characterises feminist consciousness as "revelatory; it allows us to discover what social reality is really like." So long as we are wary of the possible idealisation around this statement – the claim is just that feminist consciousness *allows* discovery, not that it guarantees it - there is an important point here: coming to feminist consciousness is not an epistemically neutral change, the new awareness it brings is not just as good as any other kind of awareness, and the knowledge it can lead to is deep and important. The reasons for this follow largely from what I have discussed previously in this thesis, particularly in the previous chapter; given the way that epistemologies of ignorance so deeply structure the lives, behaviours and motivations of the privileged - and, in a different way, the oppressed – we could not expect to overcome such ignorance without undergoing quite deep personal change. Similarly, given the achieved nature of a liberatory standpoint, we should not expect to heed the demands of standpoint epistemologies by simply choosing to employ or identity with a particular standpoint; rather, taking on a standpoint in a way with deeper, reaching effects on our lives, a genuine change in political consciousness, seems to be essential to the use of standpoint methodologies.

Harding has recently addressed this point directly, by asking what kind of "proper scientific self" we might take to be best able to produce knowledge.[126] She identifies three distinctive kinds of proper scientific selves in social justice research, one of which is the "multiple and conflicted self."[127] This kind of self "must be conceptualized as a disunified, on-going, social process, not as a coherent, static, completely internal entity."[128] She particularly identifies this kind of self appearing Intersectional Black Feminist work, and, drawing on research by Lourdes Torres, in autobiographical work by Latina feminists.

Torres notes that "men's [autobiographies] generally are presented as chronologically linear wholes, while women's stories tend to consist of fragmented, disjunctive units."[129] In particular,

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124 Pratt (1984), p. 61-64.
125 Pratt (1984), p. 60, emphasis hers. Recall my discussion of listening in the chapter 5.
126 Harding (2015).
127 Harding (2015), p. 8.
128 Harding (2015), p. 8.
129 Torres (1997), "The Construction of Self in U.S. Latina Autobiographies," in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality:*

Latina authors have attempted to claim "an identity they have been taught to despise. In order to do this, they must work through all the cultural and gender socialization and misinformation which has left them in a maze of contradictions. This results in a fragmentation of identity, and the inability to speak from a unified, noncontradictory subject position. No existing discourse is satisfactory because each necessitates the repression of different aspects of the self."[130] This work leads to a "realization that a noncontradictory, unified self is impossible within the discourses they traverse [which] opens up the possibility of radical change for these Latina writers,"[131] as they attempt "to integrate the various parts of their individual experiences and collective histories to create a new self."[132] Ultimately "The authors embrace a shifting and multiple identity which is in a state of perpetual transition."[133]

Processes of personal transformation are essential to the multiple and conflicted selves that Harding and Torres identity, as "they must learn how to transform such contradictory positions into sources of knowledge and power."[134] I believe we could identify the kind of anguished consciousness, described by Bartky and Pratt, as a multiple and conflicted self, which has attempted to create a new, feminist self out of a personal and collective history under patriarchy, and finds itself in perpetual transition.

I'd like to end this exploration of feminist consciousness with a passage from Nellie Wong to re-emphasise the liberatory potential of feminist awakening:

> You believed once in your own passivity, your own powerlessness, your own spiritual malaise. You are now awakening in the beginnings of a new birth. Not born again, but born for the first time, triumphant and resolute, out of experience and struggle, out of a flowing, living memory, out of consciousness and will, facing, confronting, challenging head-on the contradictions of your lives and the lives of people around you. You believe now in the necessity and beauty of struggle: that feminism for you means working for the equality and humanity of women and men, for children, for the love that is possible.[135]

FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS AND MORAL PHILOSOPHICAL METHOD

If we accept that feminist awakening, and other forms of political awakening, may be important

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Explorations in Feminist Philosophy, Garry & Pearsall eds. (Routledge: London), p. 128.
130 Torres (1997), p. 131.
131 Torres (1997), p. 138.
132 Torres (1997), p. 139.
133 Torres (1997), p. 140.
134 Harding (2015), p. 9.
135 Wong (1983), "In Search of the Self As Hero," in Moraga & Anzaldúa (1983), p. 179.

for being able to get at social and moral reality, we still face a question of how this can be incorporated into the methodology of moral philosophers. Though this kind of transformative experience looks more available, to a wider range of people, than trans awakening, there are still a few difficulties in recommending that people aim to undergo such an experience.

Firstly, there is a danger in the possibility of transformative experiences becoming prescriptive, something we demand of theorists, especially if being a particular sort of person is taken to be a prerequisite to contributing anything to feminist or moral philosophical discussion. In the 70s, feminist theorist Jo Freeman identified a particular practice of feminists publicly attacking other feminist women, a practice she referred to as "trashing," which damaged lives, suppressed feminist critique and action, and destroyed solidarity. Though she identified this practice as arising from internalised sexist gender roles, she also notes "It is much more prevalent … among those who stress personal changes than among those who stress institutional ones".[136] She wrote:

> The Movement's emphasis on "the personal is political" has made it easier for trashing to flourish. We began by deriving some of our political ideas from our analysis of our personal lives. This legitimated for many the idea that movement could tell us what kind of people we ought to be, and by extension what kind of personalities we ought to have. As no boundaries were drawn to define the limits of such demands, it was difficult to preclude abuses. Many groups have sought to remold the lives and minds of their members, and some have trashed those who resisted.[137]

In philosophy and in feminism, there is a risk in allowing the kind of person that we take another to be to become a reason to dismiss them, and cut them out of our discussions; though openness must be balanced against the importance of not allowing racist, ableist, classist, or cissexist comments and actions to go unchecked, and the value of creating some discursive environments where certain basic assumptions and attitudes can be taken to be shared, rather than in contention. Though I do not have much to say on this topic, it seems we can go some way towards reducing the risk involved in including transformative experience as an element of philosophical methodology by emphasising that we should not except all change to look the same, should not expect *all* epistemically valuable personal transformation to result in any *particular* kind of

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136 Freeman (1976), "Trashing: The Dark Side of Sisterhood," *Ms. Magazine* April 1976, pp. 49-51, reproduced at www.jofreeman.com/joreen/trashing.htm
137 Freeman (1976).

individual. Even self-identification as a feminist should *not* be expected among those who have been through the change I called 'coming to feminist consciousness,' considering the very good reasons to reject that term expressed by trans women who have suffered from feminist rejection and marginalisation, and by women of colour who for similar reasons have identified with alternative anti-patriarchal movements, such as womanism. Similarly, some amount of epistemic humility is called for: we should be careful of taking ourselves to have the authority to judge the kinds of attitudes, relationships and consciousness that others have; though, again, not to the extent of ignoring oppressive statements and behaviours.

A different methodological issue arises simply from the fact that feminist consciousness is rarely something that is sought out. Perhaps once a person is convinced that they need it, they already have it, or are on their way to developing it anyway. Consider the types of experience usually credited as triggering feminist awakenings: egregious experiences of sexism will happen to women anyway, they can and should hardly be sought out. Certainly some kind of appropriate response to them, tending towards feminist understanding rather than patriarchal excuses, can and should be recommended, but it seems that heeding such a recommendation would rely on a person's already having some exposure to and sympathy for feminist approaches. Coming out as a lesbian has similar methodological restrictions as trans awakening; it is of limited availability, and generally won't, and shouldn't, be sought for primarily epistemological reasons. Exposure to the feminist movement - through articles, meetings, protests, online consciousness-raising, and the like - is the most obvious path to recommend to philosophers, and fits nicely with the urgent need for philosophers to diversify their research, curriculum, and teaching methods, but it is also in some ways the weakest, least reliable path. Recently, almost everyone is exposed to some feminist thought, particularly the liberal feminism which increasingly appears in mainstream media and culture, and many even agree with it, without any transformative effect. We could advise philosophers to engage with such work in a certain spirit of openness and receptivity, rather than the argumentative resistance philosophers often bring to new texts, but again this recommendation is unlikely to move someone not already convinced of the value of feminist consciousness.

At this point it is worth spelling out more carefully how I see the relationship between personal transformation, moral philosophy, and political change. So far in this chapter I have argued that some kinds of deep personal transformation can be necessary for moral philosophers – individuals practising moral philosophy – to be able to achieve a less distorted view of moral

reality. Along with this comes the suggestion that seeking out, being open to, or exposing oneself to transformative experiences might be an essential part of moral philosophical methodology. I don't mean to suggest that seeking such changes forms anything like the entirety, or even the core of sound moral philosophical methodology. I except a lot of the more familiar activities, of theory building, research and argument to remain intact, though modified by the kinds of positions I have been discussing throughout this thesis, and by the different sensitivities that come from personal transformation. Furthermore, I certainly would not want to suggest that personal transformation is a central methodology for bringing about political change. I have only been discussing personal transformation in the context of its relation to philosophical thinking, and ultimately I am modest, even pessimistic about the role of *philosophy* in bringing about political change. Certainly, changes in individuals' consciousness have been politically important - we have seen that in the rise of feminist consciousness - and certainly widespread cultural changes are a necessary part of some political developments. However, I do not mean to suggest that directly pursuing *individual* changes in consciousness is a primary method for mass political change. I expand upon these points in what follows.

Here we might ask whether we should really be interested in personal transformation in the context of a methodological discussion. Within that narrow context, we could perhaps see the relevance of feminist awakening in how it changes what we find salient – drawing our attention towards gender, social facts and ideology, away from abstract, supposedly universalistic and apolitical categories – and how it tends to promote certain analytic tendencies, such as taking oppression and non-ideal theory seriously, being suspicious of universalistic first-personal methods, and general epistemic humility. Then, given some characterisation along these lines, could we not just directly recommend these effects as a philosophical method, rather than recommending, as DePaul does, some kind of openness to transformation? Similarly, could we not just see personal transformation as a kind of methodological epiphenomena, something that will happen to those who are on a particular philosophical path, a side-effect of a good methodology rather than a viable methodology in itself? So, feminist awakening would be an interesting topic for those concerned with personal identity, feminist behaviour, or social epistemology, without being immediately relevant to those who ask what moral philosophers should be doing when they do moral philosophy.

These points bring up three related questions, which I shall answer together. Firstly, given

the importance of personal transformation to moral epistemology, what should this tell us about the methodology of moral philosophy, if not that philosophers should explicitly aim to undergo such transformation? Secondly, who is such personal transformation available to? Thirdly, who should we, philosophers and feminists, take ourselves to be talking to when we are doing moral philosophy? In order to address these questions, we need to talk about the relationship between personal change and political change.

The kind of transformation I have discussed has an obvious political element. We have already started to see how becoming a feminist involves political change, as a feminist changes her behaviours – perhaps engaging in protests, or political conversations with friends – and changes her relationships. Hartsock stresses the way that feminist practice involves changing our social relations, and how doing so involves a political change.[138] She argues that "A fundamental redefinition of the self is an integral part of action for political change,"[139] and that "since we do not act to produce and reproduce our lives in a vacuum, changed consciousness and changed definitions of the self can only occur in conjunction with a restructuring of the social (both societal and personal) relations in which each of us is involved."[140]

For Hartsock, this is quite a strong claim, that "To change oneself – if individuality *is* the social relations we are involved in – is to change social institutions."[141] Though there is surely some truth in this, it seems that some forms of personal change could involve such minor adjustments to social reality as to not be worth mentioning. But there is a weaker point which is still important. When we consider the changed social relations which feminist consciousness has, and continues to lead women to, relations which have not been traditionally supported or allowed by heteropatriarchy, we can see how larger scale social changes were necessary, or were fought for, as part of what it took for women to become the people they saw a need to become. As women left controlling or abusive marriages, changes in divorce laws were required. Changing relationship structures have required changed institutions of marriage, adoption and childcare. The need for academic feminists to organise and work together led to campaigns for women's studies departments, and they saw the "commitment to women's studies as political action."[142] The creation of rape crisis centres, feminist lobby groups, women's media outlets, women's health

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138 Hartsock (1979).
139 Hartsock (1979), p. 60.
140 Hartsock (1979), p. 61.
141 Hartsock (1979), p. 62.
142 hooks (2000), p. 9.

centres and abortion clinics, all can be seen as political change driven by the personal change which demanded it. More recently we have seen this with transfeminist movements, as continuing activism by trans women, men, and non-binary folk, prompted by the changing understanding of self that came with trans awakening, has led to gender recognition laws, improved medical access and protocols, changes in the mainstream media's treatment of gender, establishment of trans women's presses, and so forth.

Hartsock argues that feminism's "focus on everyday life and experience makes action an necessity, not a moral choice or an option... By appropriating our collective experience, we are creating people who recognize that we *cannot be ourselves* in a society based on hierarchy, domination, and private property."[143] We acquire a consciousness which forces us, by our distress and by a practical necessity, to revolt against the inhumanity we can now see.[144] It is plausible that the kind of self transformation I have been interested in during this chapter makes political action something like a practical necessity, but this will be worryingly idealised unless we have a sufficiently broad idea of what constitutes political action. Not every feminist will stand on a picket line, organise boycotts, start a women's shelter, or join a separatist commune. There are differences in the kinds of action that various people are drawn to, have access to, have talent for, are comfortable with, or see as worthwhile. But if we can see how political struggle is involved in, if nothing else, changing our relationships with others, resisting the persistent sexism of a patriarchal society, engaging with culture and media in a less harmful way, and making our changed selves coherent to others, then we can see how the transformation involved in processes like coming to feminist consciousness necessarily involves not just political awareness, but also political action.[145]

From here we can see that political action is not entirely separable from good philosophical methodology, that the image of a purely academic philosopher, who sees the moral truth but is not driven to act in any particular way, is flawed. If to be, and to become the kind of person who can see the moral landscape more clearly necessarily involves us in political action then to argue that the proper methodology of the moral philosopher involves only the former, and not the latter, seems pointless at best.[146] I believe we should reject the idea that the job of the philosopher is

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143 Hartsock (1979), p. 64, emphasis mine.
144 Paraphrasing a quote Hartsock takes from Marx, *Selected Writings in Sociological and Social Philosophy*, trans. T. B. Bottomore (McGraw-Hill: New York), p. 232.
145 Recall the discussion of struggle in moral epistemology in chapter 5, and earlier in this chapter.
146 Hartsock makes a much stronger point, that feminist theory is just the articulation of "what we know from our practical activity." Hartsock (1979), p. 65. I am tentatively inclined to agree.

simply "to *theorize* about ethics, not to live the moral life."[147] If someone seems to be completely unchanged by their moral philosophical work, I think we could begin to question how successful a philosopher they are.

Incidentally, this element of practical necessity also limits the need for epistemic humility in a positive way. Faced with an insistence on more epistemic humility, and a directive to expose themselves to more diverse, challenging views, an experienced feminist may object that they can know that they clearly have nothing to gain from listening to male anti-abortionists or to Men's Rights Activists.[148] The practical necessity to revolt against inhumanity helps explain this; if we see individuals arguing for, and agitating for the repeal of those gains which have helped make life liveable – arguing for the repeal of anti-rape laws, banning of abortion, and defunding of women's shelters – we do not need to seriously consider the merits of their arguments, or the perspective from which they speak, to know that these positions are wrong and must be opposed. In a similar way, lived experience from a marginalised social position can reveal that some argument is not worth engaging with; Rachel McKinnon has discussed "TERF propaganda," a cluster of views promoted by a small number of cissexist feminists, including the view that trans women are "predators, attempting to gain access to women-only spaces in order to harass or sexually assault (cis) women."[149] She points out that there is no serious risk of a trans woman encountering this view and coming to believe she is a predator; she simply knows from her own lived experience that this is not true.[150] This provides another limit on epistemic humility; if our own lived experience directly contradicts some claim, there is no need to seriously engage with the claim (except insofar as we are forced to resist it), as we know there is no real possibility of it being true. This limit allows us to say that, despite the need for epistemic humility, there are some moral beliefs which are, for some people, practically beyond questioning. It also opens up space to argue that some moral beliefs *should* be beyond questioning, as some philosophers have argued of the belief that torture is wrong; though it is clear that, for the human population at large, this belief is not *in fact* beyond questioning, as it is widely and fairly openly practised, particularly, in the case of western governments, as part of incarceration and border control policies.

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147 Schwitzgebel (2012). Schwitzgebel attributes this attitude to others, but adds that he agrees with the word, if not the spirit, of the claim.
148 Thanks to my external examiner, Jenny Saul, for pushing me on this point.
149 McKinnon (forthcoming), "The Epistemology of Propaganda," forthcoming in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, p. 6.
150 That said, some trans women might buy into TERF propaganda by setting up false dichotomies; a social position does not *guarantee* access to a standpoint.

The necessity of change for feminists means that personal change and political change are entangled in both directions. It is not just that personal change causes political change, but also that political change and political action enables personal change. This is true even in first coming to feminist consciousness. Though *something* like feminist consciousness may be coherent without a feminist movement,[151] certainly the prevalence of feminist consciousness and the particular form it takes is dependant on the existence of a political feminist movement. Fischer discusses the way that feminist community is essential for shaping the kind of person a woman becomes as she enters into feminist consciousness, particularly by shaping her new habits through processes of approval and disapproval.[152] More generally, we can see how political action creates the awareness, visibility, theory, and social conditions that will lead individuals to feminism, and shape the kind of people they become.

More generally still, political change and political action is essential for creating the conditions whereby we, as philosophers and as people, can improve our moral knowledge. If it is essential for moral philosophy that philosophers become the kind of people who can discover social reality, then it is also essential that the conditions are created to allow us to become such people. Furthermore, achieving social justice, destroying oppressive institutions like patriarchy and white supremacy, is entangled with challenging ideology, tearing down epistemologies of ignorance, and correcting hermeneutical injustice; this is political work that has significant epistemic benefits for everyone, and that must be carried out if we are, collectively, to achieve less distorted ways of understanding the social and moral world.

We can also bring this idea down to a more individual level: for some people, some individual philosophers, political action may be necessary before they are capable of seeing the error in some of their moral beliefs. In discussing whether the feminist standpoint is available to all people, Kukla and Ruetsche raise the possibility of a man for whom "it is *second nature* to dismiss women's testimony as not reason-providing, at least when it comes to certain topics".[153] They argue that such a person would be irrational, and so we should not necessarily expect them to be educable, changeable, through rational methods. Rather, their "blind spots [may] need a kind of

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151 Fischer briefly discusses how this may be possible in Fischer (2014), p. 133. See also Lerner (1993), *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: from the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford).
152 Fischer (2014), p. 133.
153 Kukla & Ruetsche (2002), "Contingent Natures and Virtuous Knowers: Could Epistemology be 'Gendered'?" *Candian Journal of Philosophy* 32:3, p. 410-411. Emphasis theirs; they are using "second nature" in a technical sense.

political correction."[154] In discussing this topic, Haslanger notes "The suggestion is not that we relinquish a commitment to non-violent and rational discourse, but it is to insist that there are multiple ways to gain knowledge of social reality and the normative demands of justice, including *experience.*" In particular, she has advocated a methodology of disrupting ideology through action such as "queering our language, playing with meanings, monkey-wrenching or otherwise shifting the material conditions that support our tutored dispositions."[155]

My point here is to suggest that if we see philosophy as that collective epistemic enterprise by which we, as philosophers and as people, aim to improve our philosophical knowledge, then we should see political action as part of what it is to do philosophy, part of what it is to bring us collectively to that improved knowledge, part of the methodology of philosophy. If some factors that distort our judgement derive from living in a world permeated by injustices such as systematic gender inequality, racial oppression and systems of heteronormativity and cisnormativity, it may be the case that making collective progress in moral philosophy could essentially require changing the external world; eliminating these sources of injustice and distortion, perhaps over the course of generations. Thus, the job of philosophers (as a whole) coming to have true moral beliefs (in whatever sense) may depend on political action, which changes the world to be such that accurate moral judgement becomes, in the long run, possible.

This is similar to a much more modest claim: philosophers already understand some tasks such as teaching, establishing conferences or philosophical events, and setting up philosophical departments, as part of their job. These are tasks which are not directly about improving one's own knowledge, but rather about establishing the conditions for the continued development of philosophy, on both a personal and collective level, and I believe we could see them as part of the wider methodology of philosophy. Similarly then, if action that changes the world, that disrupts ideology, creates progressive social movements, and challenges oppressive institutions, is necessary to bring the world to a state where its inhabitants, including the philosophers, are better able to see social reality, then it seems plausible that this kind of action, too, should be considered part of the methodology of philosophy. One might see this as such a radical a departure from the ordinary idea of moral philosophy as to not really constitute philosophy any more. However, if we see moral philosophy as just that activity which helps us, collectively as moral philosophers, come

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154 Kukla & Ruetsche (2002), p. 411.
155 Haslanger (2015), "Ideology as Shared Belief and the Epistemology of Critique," presented at *Analysing Social Wrongs*, May 14th 2015, Vienna.

to the correct moral attitudes, it is hard to see any principled reason for excluding this kind of action from its purview. And, one might say, if it is excluded, so much the worse for moral philosophy.

From here, we can start to see an answer to the question of who feminist, and more generally anti-oppressive, consciousness is available to. On the one hand, we can easily imagine individuals such as the bigoted, misogynistic man, the right-wing CEO, the person in a kind of epistemic bubble, with no internal or external motivation to engage with disruptive political experiences. The kind of political consciousness and transformation I have discussed may simply not be open to them, and I don't believe it is worth wasting time worrying too much about how we could rationally convince such people. But on the other hand, there is a sense in which no one is in principle prevented from attaining this kind of consciousness; it is available to everyone *so long as* the conditions change, through political action, such as to allow them access. That is, it seems no one is excluded simply on the grounds that they are white, male, rich, or otherwise privileged, but only ever through the facts of a particular history, social position and personality, in *combination* with the operation of oppressive institutions, such as epistemologies of ignorance, which limit their access to knowledge, and which have also *shaped* their history and personality. By challenging these institutions, we may change and expand who has access to knowledge of social and moral reality.

This finally brings us to the question of who we should take to be the audience for our moral philosophical works. Philosophers rarely seem to think about who their audience is. They often express the idea that their work is, in some sense, *for* everyone, on subjects that *should* be of interest to everyone. Sometimes, particularly with more technical work, they will concede that their work is really just addressed to those with the specific education to understand it, or those already interested in some specific philosophical debate; rarely will they go on to think about how even this will structure their audience along class, racial, and gender lines. Still, this limitation is often taken to be somehow not significant; in principle, their work is addressed to everyone, it's just that, given some fairly mundane and perhaps lamentable social realities, only a few people will get it.

Rawls has claimed that "justification is addressed to others who disagree with us". Even this looks like it need not be true. Consider a gay man, seeking to articulate to himself a justification for coming out (distinct from a justification to his family for being gay). In such a case,

his moral reasoning may be addressed to no one but himself, and need not even be coherent to anyone else; and we have seen good reason to suspect that, at times, such a justification may not be understandable to everyone, though it may become more widely accessible as political realities change. More widely, we might imagine a group of animal rights activists discussing the justification of a planned disruptive action against a factory farm; they may have no interest in justifying their actions to those outside the group, and we need not assume anyone inside the group disagrees with the action. We might argue that such an attitude would be wrong – that such actions would probably not bring about any long term change if they were simply baffling to the public - but it does not look as though their attempted justifications must be incoherent or irrational *simply* because they do not extend beyond their own group.

O'Neill has specifically claimed that particularist conceptions of practical reasoning fail "in their assumption that reasoning need be followable only by a restricted audience who already share quite specific norms or practices, sensibilities or commitments."[156] She goes on to grant

> Although it is plausible enough that *some* stretches of practical reasoning have a *restricted* scope, in the sense that they can be taken to be followable only by a restricted and homogenous audience, so are 'insiders' reasoning, not all practical reasoning can have such restricted scope. In the first place practical reasoning has to be followable not only by those directly addressed on a given occasion, but by wider groups. In reasoning, in justifying what we do, in criticizing what others do, we constantly appeal to a wider group, of whose boundaries we usually lack any very definite conception. Secondly, we do not think that all those for whom thought or action is to be cogent will be closely similar to one another.[157]

I do not plan to address here the possibility or desirability of unrestricted practical reasoning, as I have already discussed this in chapter 4. What is significant here is that, although O'Neill grants the possibility of reasoning addressed to a restricted audience, she makes this reasoning derivative of, or dependant on universal reasoning, followable by everyone, "in the first place."

O'Neill frequently emphasises our connection, in practical reasoning and action, with others, while ignoring the philosophical work that goes on in making ourselves and our situation intelligible to ourselves. This is a very political stand. Consider the claim "Those whose actions and plans of action constantly assume the intelligent cooperation and interaction of many others, who

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156 O'Neill (1996), p. 52.
157 O'Neill (1996), p. 53.

differ in diverse ways, will also expect some at least of their reasoning to be followable by those others." For many marginalised groups, in the face of constant oppression, assuming 'intelligent cooperation' from members of oppressive groups is simply implausible, and any such assumption will be *severely* limited. O'Neill idealises away the political realities which make her insistence on universal reasoning untenable.

As an example: it is common for trans people to find themselves dependent on various cisgender medical practitioners. Though medical practice may seem a likely space to find intelligent cooperation, it is widely understood among trans folk that such practitioners, or 'gatekeepers,' are often obstructive, uncaring, more concerned to uphold cisnormativity and traditional gender roles than to offer urgent care, and utterly unable to comprehend trans people's experiences or self-understandings.[158] Thus trans people will often discuss among themselves how to manipulate or circumvent these practitioners. These discussions, and many articulations of trans folks' situation more generally, are not intended to be followed by gatekeepers who are seen as fundamentally hostile. This kind of non-cooperative situation will be common for members of marginalised groups, and more important than O'Neill seems to allow.[159] And certainly, this situation is not ideal, but it is the political and moral reality in a world where material power and hermeneutical resources are not distributed equally.

The methodological danger here, in emphasising universalist reasoning over more restricted kinds, is of *allowing* the existence of philosophical work addressed to a restricted audience – such as feminist theory which assumes, in its audience, the belief that sexist oppression exists – but *treating* such work as less philosophical, less important or less central to philosophical practice, further marginalising such philosophy, and its practitioners, within the discipline. By emphasising the possibility of connection with all others, in our reasoning, while ignoring the value of intra-group theorising, we would contribute to a philosophical climate where feminists face the unjust "burden of having to translate their work,"[160] a pressure to create connections and to reach for universal reasoning, which is not be felt by those, with more mainstream areas of study, whose work is simply *assumed* to be universal and legitimate.

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158 The degree to which this is the case varies from place to place, and has also changed over time. For fairly frequent expressions of trans folks' frustration with medical professionals, particularly in the UK, it is worth browsing the #transdocfail feed on Twitter: https://twitter.com/search?q=%23transdocfail.

159 See Bailey (2007), "Strategic Ignorance," in Sullivan & Tuana (2007), which examines "the ways expressions of ignorance can be wielded strategically by groups living under oppression as a way of gaining information, sabotaging work, avoiding or delaying harm, and preserving a sense of self."

160 Meagher (2012), "Feminist Transformations," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26:2, p. 205.

Relatedly, O'Neill also writes "If some practical reasoning is to be inclusively followable by all within a wide (but not precisely determined) scope, its authority may be used to assess that of other stretches of practical reasoning that are intended to be followable only by those within some more restricted portion of that wider domain, and to connect restricted stretches of practical reasoning to one another."[161] And even more explicitly, "Universalist practical reasoning can sometimes show why the claims of some restricted reasoning should be taken seriously, even endorsed *or denounced*, beyond its immediate and appropriate contexts."[162] Here, O'Neill apparently makes all reasoning addressed to a specific audience answerable to some more abstract, universal reasoning, giving the more situated reasoning a philosophically subordinate status. In this, O'Neill is clearly ignoring the possibility of intra-group reasoning which simply *cannot*, or cannot right *now*, be made intelligible to all audiences; methodologically, she is licensing philosophers to say of reasoning that they cannot follow "I can show you why this must be wrong." Though her intention here is to reject relativism, we need not be relativists to deny that some universal perspective can critique all situated reasoning, as we need not grant that all situated perspectives and standpoints are epistemically on par.[163]

To illustrate, consider how trans people have sometimes employed particular stories to intelligibly justify their transition to others, such as the "trapped in the wrong body" narrative, even if they would, in their private and intra-group reasoning, reject the essentialism that such a story rests on.[164] Here, though we have trans people deploying both universalistic and restricted understandings, they take the restricted understanding to be superior, and the universalistic understanding as flawed, presented only due to the belief that trans experience is simply not universally intelligible *at the (political) moment*. Then, as trans experiences become more widely understood and respected, the "wrong body" narrative begins to die out, as it is seen to do more harm than good.[165] Of course, it is significant here that the universalistic reasoning is flawed, but

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161 O'Neill (1996), p. 55.
162 O'Neill (1996), p. 55-6. Emphasis mine.
163 See Kukla & Ruetsche (2002)
164 See Bettcher (2014) "Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance," *Signs* 39:2, which discusses the "wrong body" narrative as a (problematic) form of resistance. Of course, some trans people do straightforwardly accept "wrong-body" narratives.
165 Hope (forthcoming) "Human Rights: Sometimes One Thought Too Many?" presents a similar story regarding justification and legitimation in Māori history, where modes of political argument understandable by European powers were sometimes strategically employed, "all the time holding that these modes did not adequately capture the nature of the injustice to be rectified" and while distinctively Māori modes of legitimation were simultaneously held, developed, and applied in other contexts. He writes "there is an increasingly audible sense among Māori that they should not have to do this, that the assertion of Māori special rights should be accepted as legitimate on its own terms."

my point is that O'Neill does not take seriously the possibility that, for some issues, there may simply *be* no relevant universally accessible reasoning, and that to insist upon or privilege such reasoning can do damage to people's identities, self-understanding, and lives.

In rejecting the supremacy of philosophy that is intended to be intelligible to the widest possible audience, I hope to make room for philosophy that is not written for, perhaps not even congenial to, the relatively privileged philosophers who continue to dominate the discipline. I mean to promote the viability and importance of philosophy which is by and for various marginalised groups, philosophy that may even be characterised as talking and thinking among ourselves/themselves; not necessarily excluding others, but making no effort to take their participation into account, or cater to their attitudes and assumptions.

Dotson has identified this goal in much feminist philosophy: "[many feminist philosophers] feel a sense of incongruence with professional philosophy's expectation of a panoramic view and the, often misunderstood, particularity attached to 'minority' social identities."[166] MacKinnon has been particularly clear about this: "Feminism does not begin with the premise that it is unpremised. It does not aspire to persuade an unpremised audience because there is no such audience."[167] Dotson also identifies this attitude among many Black philosophers, who have not accepted "the expectation that philosophical theorizing begins from the broadest possible vantage point."[168] This attitude is essential to the culture of praxis that Dotson advocates for philosophy, particularly in its "healthy appreciation for the differing issues that will emerge as pertinent among different populations."[169]

I see this particular, rather than universal, philosophy, as essential for marginalised philosophers seeking to rectify hermeneutical injustice, to create the concepts and theories they need to understand their selves and their world. Such philosophy allows those with particular standpoints, those who have undergone certain transformations or see the world in certain distinct ways, to develop their thoughts and theories together, without needing to form the kinds of connections O'Neill is interested in, and without needing to start with premises common to all philosophers. It is not just that I think these requirements would be difficult to fulfil, or an unjust burden, but rather that the kind of detailed theoretical and often personal work that this kind of philosophy involves would be impossible to achieve while struggling to be intelligible to an

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166 Dotson (2012), p. 14.
167 MacKinnon (1983), p. 638.
168 Dotson (2012), p. 14.
169 Dotson (2012), p. 17.

audience who cannot see such basic details as the existence and relevance of oppression. Even the attempt, I believe, would hamper the effort. We would risk getting stuck on the attempt to justify the positions we *need* to start at, even when, with the world as it is right now, it would not be possible to rationally get some supposedly universal audience to that position.[170]

Barbara Christian, a Black feminist working in literature, has written "what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life" and "My readings do presuppose a need, a desire among folk who like me also want to save their own lives."[171] I believe we must make room for such writing in philosophy, but by this I do not mean just that we should accept particular and personal philosophy among, or as equal to, the universal philosophy that currently dominates. An acceptance of particular philosophy must bring into question the universality of all currently practised philosophy. A cis man's feeling that he can get nothing from hearing about a theory of transmisogyny may not be strongly different to my lack of interest in a technical solution to Parfit's repugnant conclusion, or some novel articulation of possible world semantics. The idea that there is some philosophy that is somehow intrinsically of interest to everyone is an illusion perpetuated by the skewed demographics of the profession, and the particular processes by which students are educated into philosophy's existing culture and norms.

That said, this need not mean that philosophers may as well split up, stop working together, or form themselves into exclusive subgroups based on mutual interests and perspectives. In practice, that situation would not look so different from the current marginalisation of feminist and critical philosophy within the discipline, left out of courses and seminars just because no one running them feels any particular interest in the topics. By making room for philosophy that is by and for particular groups, I do not mean to suggest that other philosophers should simply ignore their work. By creating philosophy that does not explicitly address itself to the privileged, that does not seek to start from where they are, that does not foreground or cater to their way of seeing things, and that challenges or even alienates them, we need not be creating philosophy which is irrelevant to the privileged, or *completely* incomprehensible to them. Rather, it seems important that philosophers – all philosophers – develop ways of listening to, and learning from diverse kinds of philosophy without taking themselves to be authoritatively positioned to pronounce upon, to wholly understand and judge that philosophy.

Donna-Dale Marcano has asked of Black feminist philosophy "will it become a discourse in

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170 See MacKinnon (1983), p. 638-9.
171 Christian (1987), "The Race for Theory," *Cultural Critique* 6, p. 61-2.

which the experiences of black women are in the forefront but does so in such a way that it appeals to understanding that as a philosophy, it is telling us something about the world, about experiences, about philosophy, for black women but also for philosophers in general. This universality is what it means to be an authoritative discourse, but it also requires that first the philosophical establishment must recognize the significance of such a subtopic as vital to its understanding of itself."[172] It is important both that we challenge the universality of the familiar, mainstream philosophy, and that we make clear the *potential* for wider relevance in what is currently marginalised work.

Some ways of making that potential clear should be obvious. In creating philosophy from their own experiences and standpoints, marginalised folks are not seeking just to understand themselves, but also to understand their world, the wider social reality. Engaging with the work of people of colour seeking to reveal white supremacy will be invaluable for white people, such as myself, who cannot understand ourselves and our world without understanding whiteness. Engaging with feminist work will be essential for men to see and comprehend what it is to be a man in this world. Similarly for the thought and philosophy of disabled folk, working class people, queer people, trans folk, autistic and otherwise neurodivergent people, and so forth; and, of course, those at the intersections of such marginalised social positions. Though privileged people are not often encouraged to see or understand their own privilege, we cannot understand ourselves without understanding how our privilege shapes us and our world, and we cannot do that without listening, with humility, to the work of those who lack our privileges. Our work as philosophers, particularly as moral philosophers, simply cannot be done without both making a space for, and carefully engaging with the philosophy of oppressed people.

Ultimately, my goal in this chapter, and in this thesis as a whole, has been to challenge methodologies and cultures of philosophy which do not make room for, or learn from, such non-ideal philosophy, philosophy which deals non-abstractly with the issues and injustices that arise in the lives of marginalised and oppressed people. I have also argued for a loose mixture of positive and negative methodological positions: for example, I have argued against unconsidered abstraction and idealisation, and for methodologies which explicitly socially situate the researcher in relation to their topic. A number of recurring themes have appeared, such as the importance of intellectual humility, and of listening to others, rather than assuming ourselves to be perfectly

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172 Marcano (2010), "The Difference That Difference Makes: Black Feminism and Philosophy," in *Convergences: Black Feminism and Continental Philosophy*, Davidson, Gine & Marcano eds. (SUNY Press: Albany), p. 61-2.

placed to know everything philosophically worth knowing. However, no single, complete methodology has emerged; as I suggested at the outset, this was not my goal. While I believe that much moral philosophy practised today is deeply, methodologically flawed and limited, I do not have a single vision for how philosophy *must* be done, and I see this thesis as more concerned with expanding, rather than restricting, what we, in practice, count as good philosophy.

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