

# Feminism and the Logic of Morality

## A Consideration of Alternatives

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As a feminist and a moral philosopher, I have for some time been interested in the understanding of morality which emerges from the great variety of feminist writing. It has, first of all, been intriguing that the shift from liberal to radical and socialist feminisms has been paralleled by developments within moral philosophy generally and this process reveals many of the same concerns and disillusionments with liberal morality in particular. Part of what I want to do here is to outline the reasoning which lies behind this move away from the prevailing tradition of thinking regarding morality, so that it is more clear to us exactly what difficulties the question of gender raises in the process. However, it seems to me that the alternative approaches also are not without their problems. The moral arguments of some feminists raise again the spectre of naturalism in which critical distance is sacrificed and the point of being particularly 'moral' seems to be lost. Likewise the arguments of others suggest such a thorough-going social determinism that the person who decides or is responsible for her behaviour and values is lost. Thus the other purpose of this piece is to try to understand the problems inherent within these non-liberal approaches to feminist morality.

I think I am probably a 'sceptical feminist' but of a different variety to Janet Radcliffe Richards. My scepticism is not based on the belief that an unbiased examination of the 'facts of life' will yield the obvious solution to our problem, if we only would choose to view them rationally. Rather, mine is based on a concern that feminist issues are challenging moral philosophy in such radical ways that we need to tread with care over the ground in front of us. We should be more clear than I think we now are about what new beliefs regarding morality will be required of us, and ought really I think to be questioning quite seriously whether and in what sense we are ready to adopt a much-altered view of what morality is, how it works within the individual's own decision-making, and what moral imperatives might finally mean. It would be ironic indeed if the moral enthusiasm with which feminists have, throughout the years, pleaded their case were to result in such a total revamping of the moral enterprise that the possibility for future changes of this kind became more remote. I would finally like to argue, therefore, for an understanding of morality in which the elements of attachment and imagination are balanced, a view which I think is a more constructive way forward for moral philosophy, and which also illuminates feminist concerns more sensitively.

### Liberalism

In moral philosophy, liberalism is characterised by a particular approach to moral issues which has provided the rhetoric for political thinking about social and legal policies, and its influence in this regard is so widespread as to pass almost unnoticed in our society. Its history reveals its central concern with rational behaviour. Thus the belief that we can by the reasonable acceptance of principles control our actions to conform to what we know is good or right is the keystone of its construction of morality. What is required of the moral person is the choice, in a moment of freedom and detachment, of the principles for behaviour which one is prepared to live by, and a corresponding commitment to some ideal or value which is believed, felt or held to be important. Nothing necessarily limits this chosen commitment, and it is viewed as an entirely personal matter in which the mature individual engages in reflection upon those abstract directives which could form the basis for responsible choices. One's principles then become general, universalisable statements which serve as the first premise in a practical syllogism and it is up to each moral agent to guide future decisions in accordance with these. Rational behaviour is understood to be the control of choices, that is, reaching practical conclusions by calculating the best means to one's chosen end, or the best way of carrying out one's general principles. Living with other agents within a liberal society should present no difficulties for the majority of evaluative decisions, since we are free to choose how we wish to live, but this freedom can become the rallying cry of liberation movements which seek to extend social and political tolerance of personal choice. Problems emerge when it becomes clear that there is no limit, on this account, to what can be chosen as a first principle, since the description of these is formal and empty of particular evaluative content<sup>1</sup>.

This argument would be incomplete, therefore, without some suggestion that there are bounds to the kinds of things which may be chosen and that these limits are a feature of the nature of rationality. From the writings of Kant to those of Rawls, Gewirth, or Nagel, the argument is that the structure of our moral thinking in itself furnishes the necessary criteria for values, which those who are rational recognise and conform to. Those who seek for the autonomous self-legislation which this view of morality supports,

discover the implicit demand for consistency and non-contradiction, at the very least, in their moral reasoning or, more than this, may realise the basis for altruism inherent within our capacity for generalised, universal thinking<sup>2</sup>. The hope here is to discover the basis for an absolute morality, which is universally applicable and relevant, and which can serve as the basis for a sense of justice beyond the particular interests or backgrounds of any group of individuals. This absolutism is predicated on the assumption that such universal standards will not be found as part of the world, that moral values are not part of the ordinary furniture of our social or physical environment, but rather are uniquely discovered as rational necessities which require our obedience. On this view, rationality is more than a method for solving problems but yields substantive moral principles which are self-justifying and authoritative. These cluster around the notion of the equal worth of persons. The judgement of equality is founded on the capacity for reasoning about what is good (Kant), or an innate sense of justice (Rawls), or the fact that persons are prospective agents with intentions to fulfill (Gewirth and Singer). In this way, a kind of common denominator is indicated to which social and practical problems can be referred for solution and the basis for a liberal society is laid.



The liberal understanding of morality relies on the belief that each of us is capable of transcendent consciousness, that we can withdraw from the impulses of the body, the conditioning of our social milieu, and the limits of the natural environment in order to reflect upon what is the case and what ought to be done. This faculty for self-knowledge and criticism is central to liberalism, the only question being whether the principles for behaviour upon which morality relies are chosen or discovered by the free rationality of the moral agent. Morality is understood to be a special human activity both because its objects are epistemologically unique and ontologically autonomous, and because its activity of practical reasoning epitomises the control which knowledge can have over behaviour. Liberal moralists are concerned to provide a description of moral reasoning which best represents these distinctive elements and thus retains the peculiar character of human consciousness in its relation to the world<sup>3</sup>.

In the early work of Simone de Beauvoir, the emphasis on this type of freedom of choice is applied to feminist concerns. Like the Sartrean ontology upon which it is built, de Beauvoir's understanding of the life and consciousness of woman is divided between a concern for the material embodiment of her self, and for the nihilating capacity of her human consciousness. Insofar as the body is concerned, 'the data of biology' demonstrate that certain physical facts 'cannot be denied – but in themselves they have no significance'<sup>4</sup>. The human body may be 'the instrument of our grasp upon the world', by means of which we develop a peculiar perspective upon our environment, but it does not 'establish for [woman] a fixed and inevitable destiny'<sup>5</sup>. Thus, the 'body is not

enough to define her as a woman'<sup>6</sup>, but furnishes only the material stuff of existence upon which the transcendent consciousness works. The activity of this nothingness, *pour-soi*, is to distinguish itself from being, *en-soi*, and it does so by refusing to abandon its unique identity as freedom and by constantly determining the meaning or value of whatever comes its way. The risk of choice which this constant freedom entails brings dizziness, but women can accept, in the same way as men, a resolve to avoid all forms of bad faith, *mauvaise foi*, in order to lead an authentic life.

Woman is the victim of no mysterious fatality, the peculiarities that identify her as specifically a woman get their importance from the significance *placed upon* them. They can be surmounted, in the future, when they are *regarded* in new perspectives<sup>7</sup>.

To remain fully human demands the constant tension of being and nothingness in which the individual projects herself into being by means of her intentions and schemes for living, and it is in this process that values are created by human agency. The 'enormous burden' of such creative responsibility has, so far, only been bearable to men, but it is her belief that women will come one day 'to regard the universe as [their] own ... to justify the universe by changing it, by thinking about it, by revealing it'<sup>8</sup>. It is thus consistent with the understanding of humanness which this type of existentialism represents that women are understood to have fundamentally the same requirements of rational moral behaviour as men.

Janet Radcliffe Richards, in *The Sceptical Feminist*, searches for the rational principles by which such feminist moral thinking could be guided. Like de Beauvoir, she argues that women have the same capacity for judgement and valuation as men, and that, to be consistent with this, women must discover independently of their biological nature what principles best encapsulate and protect the worth of persons. After a careful and detached scrutiny of 'the proper place of nature', Radcliffe Richards believes that reason alone can reveal the necessary precepts for use in solving the practical issues of women's lives. She suggests:

The first of these principles is that *the most important purpose of society is to improve the well-being of sentient things, which should all be as well off as possible*<sup>9</sup>.

With this rational guide, we are saved the problem of the utterly free choice which continually plagued Sartre's attempt at moral philosophy, and find the missing link between the insistence upon personal decision and the recognition that we live with other persons in society<sup>10</sup>. In addition to this statement of the end which moral judgements should be seeking to fulfill, there is also a principle regarding means, namely:

*everyone's well-being is to be considered equally; when social structures are planned no individual or group is to be given more consideration than any other*<sup>11</sup>.

Radcliffe Richards argues that these principles are 'intuitively acceptable' to rational persons and their consistent working out is the project of the critical feminist as she seeks for the distribution of equal rights in her society.

Thus, the history of feminist thinking in the modern world reveals some very close links with this type of moral reasoning. From the early days during the Enlightenment through to the development of utilitarian thinking in the 19th century, feminists have made use of this understanding of rational moral behaviour in order to plead the case for women's rights. It has been a strong point of their arguments that the liberation of women is not merely consistent with liberal views of morality but that opposition to such extensions of justice is self-defeating in that it contradicts its

own presumptions. Liberal feminists thus persevere in their application of universal principles and assume that biological facts can get no purchase here. The insistence upon the special character of moral values means a rejection of naturalism of any kind. If values are not part of 'the fabric of the world'<sup>12</sup>, if good is a non-natural property, then morality relies upon the human acts of willing, choosing, valuing, practically reasoning. And the logical extension of this, as feminists saw, was that descriptions of their physical or psychological natures could in no way entail evaluations of the meaning or importance of these facts. Valuing is personal and, accepting the abstract definition of what constitutes such personhood, feminists find no grounds for the exclusion of women from this special human activity, nor from its natural outcome in the revision of society<sup>13</sup>.

However, such a view of reason may prove to be itself the victim of the genderedness which it seeks to overcome by its transcendence; its very abstractions may be implicitly formulated in a gendered way. Instead of presenting an understanding of reason which is in fact available to both men and women, Western thinkers have predicated their descriptions of this human faculty on two assumptions: firstly, that nature is understood to be feminine and it is nature which reason transcends in order to function at all, and, secondly, that women are understood to be more bound by their embodiment while reason is capable of thinking itself beyond this prison.

Rationality has been conceived as transcendence of the feminine; and the 'feminine' itself has been partly constituted by its occurrence within this structure<sup>14</sup>.

The irony is, as Lloyd suggests, that 'Gender, after all, is one of the things from which truly rational thought is supposed to prescind'<sup>15</sup>, so the discovery of 'the maleness of the Man of Reason' will not come as a welcome insight to those who believe that reason is beyond such relativities and determinations. If woman is the being who is formed as one of the terms in the dualism, if she is 'the Other' which it is the project of free rationality to elude, then participation in moral reasoning, understood in this way, becomes an implicit recognition of the superiority of the male, and particularly inappropriate for a feminist project.

This genderedness of our concepts is embodied by liberal societies in the division of public from private areas of life. The presumption that human beings are rational, meta-physically free, prudential calculators of marginal utility – and all think alike in this regard in the public sphere of politics and understanding – is used as a contrast model for the qualities and activities in a private world from which the public sphere is bifurcated theoretically<sup>16</sup>.

The difficulty is not just that the moral principles appropriate to the public realm may not fit the needs and realities of the private<sup>17</sup>, but, more than this, that they may no longer be workable at all, once the separation upon which they are founded has been exposed. Liberal feminism works so long as its devaluation of the private sphere is acceptable to women, so long as women view their problem as restriction or confinement which can be overcome by transcendence, by entering the public realm on the same terms as men. But when the private realm is itself asserted to have important insights into the nature of good and to provide a fund of moral values unavailable in the public, then the method of reasoning founded upon such contradictions breaks down. It is thus dishonest at that point to claim the irrelevance of gender in the formulation of these principles in the first place. Many current moral debates conducted in liberal terms, like those involving abortion or new fertilisation techniques or even our treatment of animals, suffer, I

think, from exactly this kind of difficulty in applying rational principles. It becomes clear in the course of these arguments both that abstract principles, like equal worth or respect for agency, may not be full enough for all our moral needs and thus distort to some extent our understanding of the issues, but also that to use them at all relies upon an acceptance of a dualistic framework which may no longer be tenable.

As liberal feminists try to make use of this approach to moral decision, they may find that the transcendence of reason around which it revolves turns out to be illusory. Is it really possible for us to discover a 'decontextualised and ahistorical' definition of justice which all "right-minded people" would accept<sup>18</sup>? The claim that such abstractions are self-verifying may be merely disguised prejudice, for they only seem convincing within the socio-historical context out of which they emerge. The moral and political recommendations of liberal feminists could, therefore, be viewed as culturally relative, not universally sound as they believe, and to be unaware of this determination of our moral ideas and values is to promote the illusion that the rational person can utter and believe timeless truths. The case becomes 'enfeebled' because it recognises no perspective from which its own can be challenged. The attempt at complete objectivity results in isolation and estrangement from the real lived conditions which feed the moral consciousness in the first place and it is an awareness and sensitivity to these which may provide us with the grounds for social and political change.

Liberal thinking is thus characterised by a longing for objectivity, but it does not escape the suspicion that its construction of rational moral precepts is context-dependent. The intention of providing such a picture of rationality is to assure us of a kind of aloof perspective from which to comprehend and judge particular cases, so that values come to reside in the world and attach themselves to facts wherever we consider them appropriate. However, the adopting of moral onlooks may not really take place in such a neatly segregated way [19]. Our acceptance of particular values may have a great deal to do with our sensitivity to certain facts which take on importance as we reflect on our situation, and our attempt to encapsulate these values into condensed generalisations may only disguise their attachment to the facts from which they emerged. The proponents of this model may be attempting to escape the inevitable vertigo of moral reasoning by promoting a 'consoling myth' of transcendence which is unsuitable and illusory.

It is only an illusion that our paradigm of reason, deductive argument, has its rationality discernible from a standpoint not necessarily located within the practice itself... The cure for the vertigo, then, is to give up the idea that philosophical thought, about the sorts of practice in question, should be undertaken at some external standpoint, outside our immersion in our familiar forms of life<sup>20</sup>.

Abandoning the myth may help us to avoid the simplistic moral psychology which divides desires or commitments from beliefs and struggles to reattach them in some way<sup>21</sup>. And it may also encourage us to appreciate the presence of moral realities within our world, in and amongst the ordinary facts we perceive.

## Naturalism

An alternative style of thinking about morality is available in naturalism and, while in many ways its proponents' values overlap with those of liberalism, nevertheless its view of decision-making is distinctive and it presents another interpretation of rationality. The structure of naturalistic morality is built up around human nature; some description of this nature forms the central core from

which the motives for moral behaviour spring and to which moral actions are directed. Under the influence of Aristotelian thinking, naturalism views the moral project as teleological, its *raison d'être* being to bring to fulfilment those features of our humanness which are present as potentialities within us and which constitute our uniqueness as human<sup>22</sup>. To act rationally is to train oneself in the choices which will allow the realisation of one's nature. Thus rationality is not transcendent in the same way as in the previous model, for human nature is not considered something confining or restricting which must be overcome in order to discover what is good. Rather, rationality works within the boundaries set by what we are. In general, because this nature of ours is multi-faceted and multi-layered, there is plenty of space within it for self-transcendence to occur, in moments of thoughtfulness or self-reflection. Butler considered this to be the primary function of the conscience, knowledge shared with oneself about one's attitudes or behaviour, and it requires no metaphysical detachment in order to function as a critical yet sympathetic judge of our selves<sup>23</sup>. What is needed, therefore, is some understanding of our nature, since this furnishes the entire context of moral thinking, and as we develop and deepen this knowledge of ourselves, so our moral reasoning becomes more relevant and fortunate.

Naturalism thus warrants the grasping of moral issues 'from the inside out'<sup>24</sup>. Moral decisions are related ultimately, not to the first premise of a syllogism which sets out some universal imperative or principle of action, but rather to some characterisation of our selves, our problems, our possibilities. This characterisation is both evaluative and descriptive; it is formulated both as a set of beliefs about our basic human needs, interests, and distinctive properties, and as an implicit appraisal of the relative importance and desirability of these features. Some hierarchical ordering of these makes the act of choosing what to do more clear, for decisions become a matter of discerning, considering, discriminating within the context of these priorities what is to be done in given circumstances. The understanding of human nature provides a more or less elaborate and detailed specification of the kinds of things which are held to be true of oneself and which one ought also to *make* true by one's choices. Thus, morality is as much a matter of being a certain kind of person as it is of doing certain kinds of things. It requires the development of those qualities of character by which moral discernment also improves, and reciprocally, the ability to distinguish the important features of a situation is what the attainment of a virtue consists in.

In moral upbringing what one learns is not to behave in conformity with rules of conduct but to see situations in a special light, as constituting reasons for acting; this perceptual capacity, once acquired, can be exercised in complex novel circumstances, not necessarily capable of being foreseen or legislated for by a codifier of the conduct required by virtue, however wise or thoughtful he (sic) might be<sup>24</sup>.

The circularity of this process is unavoidable since naturalism claims no standpoint outside our natures from which we could view the progress of morality or make any sense of its activities. It represents therefore an alternative moral epistemology.

Feminists have also used this model in order to express the special nature of women's lives. Radical feminists, in particular, have asserted the uniqueness of woman, the positive qualities of her character, the important insights which she brings to moral considerations. Rather than appealing to some abstract understanding of what constitutes personhood, radical feminists assert the necessary link between biology and personal identity, so that, in particular, men and women are understood to be two different kinds of person. The biological makeup of each is claimed to be



more than a mere factual description of external properties, since any such description is, at the same time, an assessment of relevant features which have moral import. What has been mistaken in the past, according to this view, is not what the liberal feminists argue – namely that woman's value has been tied to her embodiment, a tie which rational thought and judgement can finally detach – but rather that the understanding of the meaning or value of that embodiment has been wrong. And this reassessment can only take place from within gender, not from outside, from within the onlook regarding one's embodiment, not from without. The inappropriateness of the evaluative descriptions of women's nature from our tradition is increasingly *felt* by women who now, on the basis of their own lived experience, call for other features of their natures to be given credit, to be considered 'salient', to be rendered meaningful within a new onlook. It is the point of radical feminist writings to offer this new vision of woman and, through their utopian fictions, to provide some happier prospect for the renewal of society in which women's morality predominates.

In the work of Carol Gilligan on the moral development of women, a subject which had always remained hidden within studies of the purported moral development of human beings, she illustrates the pervasive maleness of the model of moral maturity which has so far been used in work of this kind. Men have described morality in terms familiar to them and have thereby considered boys, in their development, and men, in their later life, as the ones who develop most fully, while girls never reach the final crowning stages and are thus classified as 'morally immature'. Freud already had proclaimed this in his observation that women refuse 'blind impartiality' in decisions and thus have an inadequate sense of 'justice'<sup>26</sup>, an observation which Gilligan's discussions with women confirm. The result has been a lived contradiction, expressed by Virginia Woolf as 'a mind which was slightly pulled from the straight and made to alter its clear vision in deference to external authority'<sup>27</sup>. Women experience this in self-doubts, and in a divided conscience, when their 'public assessment and private assessment ... are fundamentally at odds'<sup>28</sup>, and the resulting confusion constitutes the major hurdle in women's moral development. What emerges from Gilligan's study is that women consider moral issues in quite a different way to men, that indeed the liberal model of morality, which is so widely assumed to belong to humanity in general, is alien to women, fitting uncomfortably to their lives and misrepresenting their ideas and interests. Thus, 'a morality of rights and noninterference may appear frightening to women in its potential justifica-

tion of indifference and unconcern' <sup>29</sup>. Women seem much more concerned, in *their* definition of what constitutes morality, with relationships, interdependence, intimacy. To question the belief that this latter is a deformed or immature morality is to begin to undermine some fundamental assumptions about what the logic of morality is. Gilligan herself begins to interpret this in terms of rejecting 'the Greek ideal of knowledge as a correspondence between mind and form', in favour of 'the Biblical conception of knowing as a process of human relationship' <sup>30</sup>. Her challenge is that the essence of morality may, in fact, be its perspective-bound, relational quality.

This point is pressed home most vehemently in the writings of Mary Daly, and her work reveals the extreme implications of taking such an 'inside' view of morality. The critical part of her analysis is a methodical investigation of man's creation of woman, a vivid and gruesome study of the way in which man makes woman into 'the Other'. Man's understanding of woman as less human, as imperfect or deficient in relation to himself, as incapable of transcending nature, as an object or possession requiring his moulding and direction, reveals the fundamental link between his moral ideas and his own embodiment. He is revealed as the one who seeks domination, who attempts to control nature, who makes and produces things, who creates culture and its images, and he does these things as the natural expression of his physiological makeup. His morality is bound up with his interpretation of his own biology, and is thus labelled 'phallic morality' and its social outcome, 'patriarchy'. Daly's critique is intended to be sweeping and general, for she wants to expose the entire worldview which has been built up around male nature as it expresses itself in every place and time.



As her positive suggestion, she urges the expression of woman's own embodiment, by means of reclaiming the language of misogyny. All words are to be rewritten with feminist meanings foremost and, by means of this simple trick, the domination by the alien body-mind of man will be broken <sup>31</sup>. These new insights come, not from some external perspective, but from looking hard at the words which women have, up until now, been willing to utilise for their own self-understanding, until the penny drops and they see their own oppression. Likewise, this freedom is gained by a reinterpretation of actions, which once again does not rely upon women's abandoning what comes naturally to her. Those activities which have been kept in their place within patriarchal societies, which have been mistrusted and labelled 'sin' – most importantly women's spirituality and communion with nature –

these are to be freed from determination by male priorities and fears, and allowed full freedom of expression and realisation as woman's superiority. Woman's own self-image is restored to her by means of finding within her place and her own nature those qualities by which she can experience the joy of living and the world, hopefully, can be freed from its devastation by man. She then can see the various features of her life which have been distorted and misjudged, and, viewing them in a new light, come to evaluate herself positively. Daly's feminist recreation of woman is naturalistic reasoning about moral values; the meaning of the moral imperatives in her scheme is to be discovered within her reinterpretation of the meaning of gender. Her portrayal of the situation as a struggle between female and male, life and death is separatist, dualistic, and uncompromising, for there is no possibility of one seeing the other point of view by leaving their own nature behind <sup>32</sup>. What is called for here is the reconsideration of our view of gender 'from the inside out', and it reveals just how deeply these issues may cut into our moral epistemology. To reconsider moral concerns in this area is to look more closely at what exists within the terms of our available moral vocabulary until we recognise something new and discern a different reality. The issue which radical feminism finds at the heart of morality is the need for such renewed vision.

However, it is the logic of this moral vision which constitutes the central problem facing a naturalistic account. This is the root of the challenge, by liberal thinkers, that such moral reasoning is guilty of committing the naturalistic fallacy <sup>33</sup>. Women who identify goodness with whatever a woman does, and assume evil to be *by definition* what is of male origin or intention, are committing this fallacy and the problem with engaging in this fallacious reasoning is that moral language becomes either contradictory or redundant. Since, according to the liberal model, it is by means of our rational distance from embodiment that we are capable of evaluation at all, 'naturalistic' feminists seem to depend upon an objective principle of judgement which their description of good, as 'equivalent to what is female', cannot accommodate. If good is defined as a natural property, then the use of the word 'good' becomes unnecessary; if it has some special meaning, then it is contradictory to define it in purely naturalistic terms. Naturalism therefore seems self-defeating. Morality which prides itself upon being intrinsically partisan leaves no room for getting outside by means of increasing generalities or abstractions. The notion of a transcendent rationality has been one way of avoiding the narrowness, and ultimate circularity, of this concern by indicating to us the rational necessity for discovering independent criteria by which to assess particular actions or policies, criteria which can be applied to any circumstance at any time.

Naturalism runs the risk of being so deterministic in its description of the basis for moral evaluation, that the force of 'ought' is lost in its moral prescriptions. Many radical feminist arguments seem to reiterate what has previously been said of women in a new guise, namely that 'biology determines destiny'. The response of radical feminists to the history of male determination of biology is to urge a reversal of values, but within the same overall confines of physical determination. The landscape is still dominated by sexual differences; biology is both the problem and the solution <sup>34</sup>. What is in danger of being lost from such an account is the fact that *how* biological realities shape our thinking and acting is partly, at least, up to us. This argument does not demonstrate well enough how our interpretations of biology interact with physical realities in the first place. Is the force of one point of view overcome by the force of another? Does the change from one view to another occur without language and thought? If the vocabulary of our oppression is utterly alien to the new one of liberation, then how do we recognise its presence or appreciate its



importance to life? If the process of this reevaluation of biological facts does not occur on the basis of some detached criterion, which radical feminists seem intent upon debunking, then how it does take place needs more careful examination. Otherwise we are left with the need for some conversion to a new point of view, a conversion shaped by realities more powerful than our consciousness of them.

While naturalism makes it easier to understand the attachment of an onlook to its natural grounding and context, which is essential to its construction of morality, it makes more difficult the prospect of coming to find a common ground by means of each individual leaving behind the particular aspects of her perspective. If rational considerations are bounded in the way that naturalism suggests, then this affects relations between women and men very deeply. The notion of two separate moralities can result in a distortion of our full understanding of what morality is. There are instances of imperatives for men's lives which require of them also a concern for relationships, for sacrifice of their personal interests to benefit the group and these suggest that morality is one, though it may be bisexual<sup>35</sup>. There are increasing numbers of men who believe themselves to be genuinely in sympathy with the values and qualities of life which radical feminists admire. Thus, they also decry the elimination from public life of the values traditionally consigned to the private realm, and it seems particularly inappropriate to call their concern self-centred, or deviously power-seeking, merely because they are biological males<sup>36</sup>. Male writers have been just as damning of phallic morality, seeing in it all the fears and insecurities which plague the psyche of man and encourage his pretentious destruction of nature<sup>37</sup>. How are we to *understand* these moral arguments if the gulf between men and women is so wide? Surely we do find ourselves in sympathy with some of what is said; we can at least make sense of it and appreciate its impulses. Naturalism makes plain to us the discreteness and particularity of vision which is characteristic of both moral and aesthetic values, but it also requires some description of the hinges which remain for the door between two points of view to be opened successfully.

The emphasis in naturalism on the particularity of moral onlooks can mask the presupposition which nevertheless seems to be essential to morality of any kind – namely, that its impulse is towards the general and inclusive. Without such transcendent appeal, moral language may become superfluous and the claim of feminists no more or less important than those of anyone else looking after their own interests. Naturalism furnishes this by means of a conception of shared human nature, thus confining the spaces in which moral thinking takes place. Its description of this, however, can become just as decontextualised and ahistorical as the liberal emphasis on universal rationality. Unless we recognise our participation in the creation of this context, we will be left with a preconditioning of life too heavy to be shifted by creative thought. Particularities of embodiment may shape our evaluations, but these are, in the end, what we make of them. How such generalisations regarding the essence of human nature actually work in our moral reasoning becomes an important matter, therefore, and one which we should handle with care.

## Social Constructionism

Yet another way of understanding morality is available from those who would claim that moral ideas and values are a construct of various social conditions, including both material and ideological elements. Rather than emphasising the autonomous person who freely decides how to act as in the liberal approach, and rather than assuming that human nature by itself can form a sufficient background for choices, this approach presumes the priority, both

historically and epistemologically, of the social over the individual. The distinctive features of this approach are, firstly, the moral significance which is given to roles and relationships within a certain social order, and, secondly, an observation that our language and therefore our thought are confined to the parameters of the socially defined. The first aspect is expressed by the claim that the general moral principles and particular practical guidelines which we use for decision-making are the products of the needs and interests of the social group. They are already established as possibilities when we reflect upon a given situation or problem. We learn our behaviour and our self-identity in the first place as members of a group and in the process of this practical education, a way of life in which we also share is imposing itself upon us. Once again, Aristotle is the seminal figure here in demonstrating the link between value and social function, and, according to this case, in suggesting that practical decisions can be related non-syllogistically to statements of one's role, rather than to general principles or universal imperatives<sup>38</sup>. Our understanding of ourselves as moral beings is fundamentally shaped by networks of relationship and institutional customs, and we are therefore acting out these pre-existing patterns in our personal choices<sup>39</sup>. Values are thus part of the fabric of society into which we are woven; they embody social concerns and they confirm the social ordering necessary for a way of life to continue. Without such foundation, they lose their attachment to the very realities to which they are intended to bring meaning<sup>40</sup>.

The second aspect of this approach is expressed in the Wittgensteinian notion of language games, which suggests the limits of our rational transcendence and the concurrent determination of consciousness and behaviour. We are always thinking within one strand of language or another, and there is no place altogether outside these which can provide us with a pivotal point. Thus, once again, the supposed objectivity of liberal principles collapses into particular context-dependent concerns of particular groups or individuals<sup>41</sup>. Morality cannot therefore be a matter of leaving or transcending some world in order to discover what one ought to do, nor does it require us to return to impose this advice upon ourselves. Rather it is a matter of learning how to play the game and discovering within the rules what one is expected to do in order to qualify as a player. How we see ourselves and how we learn to act within various social contexts are parts of the same process, and their interdependence makes the link between thought and behaviour real<sup>42</sup>. What is creative about our moral reasoning must then be the construction of new variations which are possible within these bounds, and they are tested by whether or not they work successfully in these terms.

There are feminist writings which rely upon this social constructionist model of morality, and its distinctiveness becomes more clear when we consider the way in which gender issues cut across its field. These feminists have tried to demonstrate the determination of women's lives by the various role models and opportunities for expression which society makes available, and have shown how women's consciousness and morality is an internalisation of such outward social necessities. When young, women are taught their self-identity in terms of certain expectations and possibilities, and learn to relate moral decisions about behaviour to these directly, from statement of role to evaluative conclusion. Thus, de Beauvoir is again used, this time for her belief that women are made, not born; it is the intention of this view to disclaim 'biological essentialism' of any kind which would materially and physically determine what woman is. Social roles and relationships not only define women's lives and become deeply carved into their self-understanding, but they are learned as behaviour patterns which have moral importance and which express, in a social way, what women understand themselves to be

personally. It is the task of the critical feminist to become aware of these determinations by using available language and thought, and by means of this description of the nature of women's lives, to test the fit between any particular set of social institutions and some notion of what would be more fulfilling for women. There is no attempt here to discover universal principles which apply to all persons regardless of gender, nor to find some ahistorical understanding of women's nature that can be used as a permanent foundation for revision. Rather, these feminists believe that within present realities lie the seeds of change, which the women who understand the morality of the present order can nourish, by their critical insights, into a healthier new society grown out of the past.

Juliet Mitchell is a good example of this type of feminist thinking, particularly in her early book, *Women's Estate*. It is important for women to be precisely aware of the economic functions which their lives are meant to perform, to see how the four social structures of Production, Reproduction, Sexuality, and Socialisation oppress their lives and build upon their supposed biological weaknesses and proclivities. The second step is to understand the ideological covering of these functions, since it is this which women take into their consciousness and are thereby produced as women. Ideology provides the sense of historical continuity and gives the illusion of a permanent, autonomous source of value. In each of these areas, women are exploited by cultural necessities and made to believe that these functions are essential to her nature. To understand this is to become critically aware of the imperfections, or contradictions, of the present social order, and it is in the gap between these and her own self-awareness that women's new understanding is to make its impact<sup>43</sup>. Thus we begin with the factual questions: 'What is the situation of the different structures today? What is the concrete situation of the women in each of the positions in which they are inserted?' and we discover there the sources of change.

A revolutionary movement must base its analysis on the uneven development of each structure, and attack the weakest link in the combination. This may then become the point of departure for a general transformation<sup>44</sup>.

Mitchell understands this change as the breakup of 'an oppressive monolithic fusion'<sup>45</sup>, after which each of these functions can begin to discover a new identity and express themselves as 'life-giving', rather than as institutionalised death. It is her hope that a new social order can be devised out of the antipathies and alienation of the old, which will more adequately express the 'bio-social universal' of human existence, and it is this which furnishes the basis for the moral consciousness to pry open the oppression of any given order.

Rosalind Coward, on the other hand, rejects the 'base/super-structure' model of Mitchell's analysis, in which revolutionary morality can get a grip, and offers instead a description of the tightly-knit relation of consciousness to culture. Like radical feminists, she claims that women's consciousness is produced and structured by an ideology which expresses the biological and psychological needs of men. The interest of men in promoting their particular perception of sexuality and in developing a culture which expresses this phallic superiority, has so far dominated human history. This universality of cultural production demonstrates the way in which biological realities are mediated via social constructions and discourses. Therefore, unlike radical feminists, she claims that there is no way to get back through all of this to a pure or unstructured conception of what the reality underlying it all might be. As a result, she is more pessimistic about changes within the terms so far established. Her book is an attempt to demonstrate,

that various accounts of the family or the history of the family rely on a notion of the sexual drive as a given, which has as its aim sexual reproduction. Concomitantly, men and women are theorised as having radically different aims and pleasures; sexual relations and sexuality are seen as the same thing, both deriving from absolute sexual difference in the service of reproduction<sup>46</sup>.

This determination of our categories of thought is so profound that Coward believes all of the discourses so far used to understand ourselves have relied, with the exception of psychoanalysis, 'on a notion of sexual identity (and therefore sexual regulation) as pre-given'<sup>47</sup>. It thus becomes 'virtually impossible' for us to break out of this circle and understand ourselves in any other way.

Discourse-analysis, however, does provide for Coward a critical basis, for it helps us to find what is invisible or hidden within what exists.

In the fullness of the discourse, there are oversights, lacunae, the 'blanks on the crowded text'. To see these blanks, something more than close attention is needed. What is required is a new gaze, an informed gaze, itself not the product of any one individual, but made possible by changes on (sic) the exercise of vision, changes in social and political conditions<sup>48</sup>.

The unique challenge of feminism is to ask unasked questions and, in so doing, to make the gaps in present structures more obvious. In this task of deconstructing what is given, new possibilities can emerge, but these are understood, not as somehow more adequate to an underlying humanness which might lie outside our discourse, but rather as more adequate to the particular *discourse* of feminism itself. Having untied the link between our language and some foundational reality, there is left only our language, in one form or another, and its relative values and moral expressions. Freudian analysis at least provides a critique of sexual constructions from the standpoint of an 'initial bisexuality', but Coward herself goes further into eradicating 'the individual', who is supposed to go through such sexual developments, from discourse altogether. The result of her version of social constructionism is that the idea of a coherent subject who is either the outcome or the origin of social roles is seen as 'a fantasy'. Thus, 'not only is identity a construct, but it is also continuously and precariously reconstructed'<sup>49</sup>. In the end, male and female are constructions of social identities relying upon this notion of a centred self which has instincts, dispositions, anatomical characteristics, and behavioural patterns, and it is only in finally coming to terms with, and rejecting, this, that feminism can carry through its radical argument for getting beyond dualism.

This view of morality understands values, therefore, to be fundamentally expressive both of social requirements in themselves and of the human exigencies around which the society is formed. Values are created out of material conditions; they constitute the meaning that has been constructed out of the lives and circumstances of the participants in society<sup>50</sup>. Their authority is thus understood by those within the system, as it were, and cannot be grasped independently of this. What becomes more problematic here is to explain, without reference to a transcendent rationality, how a society could ever imperfectly express its required values, or vice versa, how any values could ever be used as critical of the society from which they emerged in the first place. Without reducing itself to a blind tautological statement that what a society values is what it values, this view must both maintain that values are intelligible within a way of life, and that social and historical changes occur on account of the imperfect fit of values to the realities which they supposedly serve. The dialectical method of

resolving this problem suggests that, due to the historical (i.e. non-static) character of human social life, it is always conceivable for the individual or group awareness to stretch beyond its horizons into future possibilities. However, either these must rely on some unrealised potential which exists now within the order of things, and that requires some 'base' which the 'superstructure' imperfectly mirrors, that is, a non-linguistic reality against which the language of values can be measured. Or this method needs some view of the outer reaches of imagination or thought which would have to be, to some extent, free of being fixed by social realities, and indeed be capable of judging or criticising them; and this thought might then be considered 'unreal' and lose its character of immanence because we could not get a handle on its meanings.

Part of the case which is made here is the same as the one the liberals hoped to make, namely that biology and value are not necessarily linked in any authoritative way. Women who realise this can thus be freed to reconsider the meaning of their biological existence in ways that may be felt as more authentic, and this view seems to suggest that it is possible for us to do this. Indeed, it is the responsibility of the reflective woman to do so. On the other hand, its description of the social character of language and values makes it plain that whatever those links have been thought to be, however the ties between biology and value have been knitted, has served and continues to serve as an expression of some underlying need or reality. While we would like therefore to fly as birds into imaginative new principles of judgement, we discover our feet of clay which fix us in an even more rigidly determined reality. In turning to Freud, both Mitchell and Coward find evidence for this universalism of patriarchy. While the former believes that Freud is describing women in a particular society - namely under the conditions of advanced capitalism - which might ultimately be overthrown so that their 'true' natures could be realised, the latter considers such optimism to be naive, since the base in human nature upon which the revolution could be constructed is believed to be deterministic<sup>51</sup>. The freedom which is supposed to be produced by this realisation of our social determination seems therefore to be elusive. We are still not the makers of ideology, no matter how unattached it may be from natural realities, and thus the totality of women's oppression seems more unassailable than ever<sup>52</sup>. One wonders why we are thinking about it.

Ultimately, social constructionism can become too concerned to debunk our notion of what is 'real' by claiming that our handle on reality is linguistically shaped. Thus, 'the categories through which we appropriate "the real" in thought are discursively constructed rather than given by the real'. At one level, this insight is 'tautological to the point of banality', since it only serves to indicate that 'our knowledge of the real cannot exist outside discourse'. Admitting that this is the case, however, does not require us to sever the bonds of knowledge and reality altogether, so that all becomes discourse or varieties of language use<sup>53</sup>. We can avoid the dogmatism of distinctive viewpoints, and the determination of moral values by non-moral realities, not by doing away with these distinctions altogether, but by making wiser and more careful use of them. Indeed Barrett, quoting Timpanaro, calls this a kind of 'extraordinary arrogance' which conjures away external reality by claiming the only valid object of study to be *our knowledge of objects of study*<sup>54</sup>. Giving us the perspective of the divine but without any of its power seems of little point. To focus so exclusively on how our thought understands itself is to lose the initial attachment to natural human activities which language must have in order to be learned, and to overlook the discernment of 'salient' features of reality which it is the concern of morality to represent in some overall pattern of meaning.

What is challenged by these issues is the nature of the moral agent. While the initial enthusiasm for this approach was surely

fired by personal experience and concern, it ends by threatening the existence of a person at all who might have lived this or could alter it. On the one hand, this is a way of describing our complicity in the structures that shape our lives such that no individual guilt is incurred. Since we are utterly the products, mind and body alike, of material or ideological conditions, it is more easily understandable that so many women live out their lives in perfect conformity to their situation, without question or even unhappiness. If we are what we have been made to be, then no disruption can or need occur, and personal responsibility is absolved. Here is the passivity of the consciousness which only receives from its surroundings the material it requires for moral reflection. On the other hand, the extent of this impersonal determination makes us feel the hopelessness of our circumstances even more keenly, but without giving us the necessary grasp of some reality by which to shift the present one. No longer may a revolution be effected by a poem<sup>55</sup>, since even this will be shaped by prevalent meanings and existing possibilities. This viewpoint encourages us to look back upon ourselves, our language, and our values in a way which might be consoling, but which leaves us with no way to grasp the future that is not yet determined because it has not yet happened. How that future is to come about may not be predestined, and it is certainly part of our moral experience to sense some risk, some responsibility, some decision by which it may be realised. The phenomenology of the moral consciousness reveals the active attempt of individuals to grasp or make sense of their situations in ways that are novel, and indeed it may be this very activity upon which future hopes inevitably must be founded.



What this suggests is that we need to find some balance in this perspective between the inner and the outer points of view. One of the things we can do is to examine the windscreen of the car we are driving so that we can notice its cracks, see where it is smudged, observe the way in which the particular material of which it is made distorts our vision of what is around us, or find the clear spaces by which we can get a good view of what lies ahead. In this way, we become aware of our finitude, our limitations, our unique perspective which constitutes our identity as persons with a point of view. But it is quite another thing actually to drive the car, an activity in which *staring at the windscreen* would be a serious liability since it is what we need to *use* in order to be able to get anywhere at all. Unless we desist from the activity for which windcreens were originally devised and found practicable, we



must sometimes merely use them to go forward without noticing them. So with our moral concepts and language. It is the human activity of making sense of life which gave rise to these in the first instance, albeit in a social environment, and they retain what meaning they have in the context of human purposes and pursuits, interests and intentions. Examining them to see just how limited and proscribed they are, finding the bits of dirt that blur our moral vision, criticising the criteria which are used for judgement, is necessary for moral clarity, but is not the end in itself. The point of such refinement of moral vision is to move forward towards a closer approximation of language and reality, or of social mores with the human activities from which they spring. Feminist challenges in this area may turn out to be an instance of Williams' claim that 'reflection may destroy knowledge', since what we find here is, ultimately, the inability to provide moral knowledge or guidelines when one is so heavily sedated by an overdose of self-reflection<sup>56</sup>.

## Conclusion

Feminist writings, by contributing to the present criticisms of moral epistemology, have left in their wake a great number of issues which now call for some imaginative and sensitive handling if we are to develop in our understanding of the moral enterprise. We need to consider an account which is not only more satisfactory in its understanding of feminist concerns, but also more adequate as a rendering of the logic of moral reasoning, for these two are inextricably bound up with one another.

From the liberal perspective on morality, feminism seems to provide no unusual or disturbing challenge, since its requirements are believed to fit comfortably with the general principles for just treatment and considerations of equal rights which are central to its moral prescriptions. Continuing dissatisfaction from feminists in this area seems inappropriate since their needs are so easily accommodated. Feminist issues are either treated as trivial because their resolution seems, on liberal grounds, so patently obvious; or they seem to be irrelevant to liberal principles, because any attention paid to the uniqueness of the women's issue, as opposed to any other, is an unnecessary fuss for such abstractions as justice and equality; or they are considered to be uninteresting for any 'real' concern of morality since feminist demands are personal or partisan. There are presumably many who believe that the theoretical moral issues raised by feminism have therefore been resolved and nothing further remains to be *said*, though there may be a lot more to *do* to clear away the remnants of injustice. The way in which liberalism expresses its concern for women's issues is to emphasise what it takes to be the obvious need of any morality, namely, some general principles regarding what ought to be done. These are understood to have a rational necessity which enhances the human freedom by means of which they are discovered and, thus, they are believed to be the best hope for retaining distinctively human qualities. Having distilled this essence of morality, liberalism need only pursue the practical business of applying its principles in an even-handed way. This is what moral reasoning requires and, in its exercise, there are no gender distinctions.

The trouble with both the naturalistic and social constructionist accounts is that the temptation to generalisation is once again present, although the lines are drawn in slightly different ways. In the first case, the move towards finding a common denominator in human nature leads to a tension within its account of morality. Beginning with an analysis of the way in which decisions are tied up with our understanding of ourselves, it helpfully illuminates the particularity of moral choices. Yet it increasingly presses for the description of the foundation for morality and in so doing conjures up abstractions of another kind to liberalism, but which are

nonetheless ahistorical and essentialist<sup>57</sup>. The recognition of this natural grounding becomes a statement of such overall patterns that it lends itself to an endless search for counter-examples. In this case, what begins as a genuine reconstructive task using feminist insights ends as either hopelessly separatist or too vague for the derivation of any helpful guidelines. Indeed, unless analysis of the logic of onlooks regarding our humanness is handled with more care, there will be nothing to prevent the traditional, long-lasting descriptions of the male-female relationship from being trotted out once again, with a reactionary sneer of disdain.

Likewise, in social constructionism, the effect of feminism has been to make us aware of the very deep consciousness and symbolic value of gender as it seems to express itself over and over again in the construction of social organisations, roles, and relationships. As a critique of the way in which value is expressed and ordered in social groups, this perspective challenges us to be more self-aware of the determination of thought and language by these gender categories, but its conclusions seem morally self-stultifying. Feminist questions arose in the first instance, presumably because of some gaps or imperfections in the fit between moral injunctions, with all their underlying assumptions, and lived experience. To raise questions about the confinement of women's lives by social definitions was to discuss something about which women cared and which was therefore understood to be more than a bland factual analysis of what does and does not exist. However, not only the original morality, but now also one's concern about it are viewed as instances of the unintentional construction of meanings; for the spaces which we think we have 'chosen' to occupy as social revolutionaries are in fact the ones laid out for us by the available options. What reality there was to begin with, against which the present order of things seemed to measure up so badly, now turns out itself to be fabricated, as a projection of present meanings. Once we understand this, there is nothing available to us for moral awareness, and moral sensitivity becomes reduced to the one-dimensional phenomenon of thought thinking about itself. Such generalities require detachment to be grasped but there is nothing further to be done with them; morality can be abandoned as 'humanistic' or 'essentialist'.

My concern with these tendencies in naturalism and social constructionism is for the loss of the person, which becomes either a particular instance of general human essence or a decentred self. It seems to me that this is not only too high a price to pay for the feminist insights which may be derived from these accounts, but also an unnecessary abstraction for any development of practicable feminist morality. And this is the task which really now should face us. Perhaps I could just begin to sketch out such an account. Morality is a matter of personal development in sensitivity towards ourselves and the others with whom we share life, a sensitivity which is practiced by deepening one's insights into present social realities, by learning to discern the nuances of meaning in the language and thought which confront us, and by committing ourselves to realising some possibilities as more fulfilling than others. As in artistic creation, we can hear more harmonies or visualise more arrangements, the more attuned we become to what is already there; our innovative contribution comes as we make those real, and they are fortunate when they do in fact work. Human nature provides the overall context in which the reasoning mind searches for its possible courses of action, and it does so within the confines of social structures. Moral thinking comes up against social and natural realities that are not entirely of our own making and these are subject to continuous historical changes. This can be seen, not as a limitation to our moral questioning, but rather as a source of its purpose and significance, since ultimately there are choices which will or will not succeed,

in the here and now, in creating human fulfilment. We understand what these might be as our sensitivity to particular instances and realities develops. The active dialogue between the changing aspects of our humanness amidst various social interactions and our enquiring imagination is what shapes moral questions and their answers. Reality and imagination are bound together. We can

form our new self-understanding imaginatively out of the materials given to us by taking advantage of the spaces within what is there. In this process, new meanings will emerge as the dimensions of our insight are opened out, and we will discover the sources of moral inspiration for use in the future<sup>58</sup>.

## Notes

- 1 See the discussion of this problem in Sartrean ethics by Mary Warnock, *Existential Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 18-52. For the issues raised by the prescriptivist account see J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1981), esp. part 4 on 'Universalization'. Mackie states: 'On this view there are only formal, but no material, constraints on what can count as moral. The form, universal prescriptivity, is determined by the logic of moral terms, but the content is entirely a matter for decision by the person – or of course it may be a group of persons – who makes the moral judgements or subscribes to and adopts the moral system' (pp. 85-86).
- 2 H. J. Paton, *The Moral Law* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1969), pp. 67-68 [The categorical imperative]. See also Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).
- 3 See Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985) for a discussion of the impasse between two aspects of moral thinking: on the one hand the risk of free choice which morality implies and, on the other, the attempt to ground this choice in some limiting facts about rationality.
- 4 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 31.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 685, my italics.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 671.
- 9 Janet Radcliffe Richards: *The Sceptical Feminist* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1982).
- 10 See de Beauvoir's recognition of the insufficiency of freedom alone to resolve the problems of women, *op. cit.*, 'It is not to be supposed, however, that the mere combination of the right to vote and a job constitutes complete emancipation...' (p. 639). Her thinking in response to this, however, creates problems for the liberal model; see Ann Foreman, *Femininity as Alienation* (London: Pluto Press, 1978), Chapter 8.
- 11 Radcliffe Richards, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
- 12 Mackie, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
- 13 Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (Dublin, 1793): 'Let woman share the rights and she will emulate the virtues of man; for she must grow more perfect when emancipated, or justify the authority that chains such a being to her duty – if the latter, it will be expedient to open a fresh trade with Russia for whips' (p. 256).
- 14 Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 104.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. ix.
- 16 Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981), p. 118.
- 17 See Marjorie Weinzwieg, 'Philosophy, Femininity and Feminism', *Philosophical Books*, Vol. 24, No. 3, July 1983, for a discussion of the inappropriateness of the notion of freedom as 'self-control' which is possessed by both men and women, particularly in the areas of sexual relations and of pregnancy and childbirth. See also Radcliffe Richards's reply.
- 18 Jean Grimshaw, 'Feminism: History and Morality', *Radical Philosophy* 30, Spring 1982, p. 3.
- 19 Donald Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement* (London: SCM Press, 1963): '... if I do deliberate concerning the formulation or acceptance of a typical outlook, it is misleading to depict the logical structure of this deliberation either in terms of a decision – *that* and a decision – *to* which are completely independent, or in terms of a decision – *that* which is totally dependent on a decision – *to*' (p. 137).
- 20 John McDowell, 'Virtue and Reason', *The Monist*, Vol. 62, No. 3, July 1979, pp. 346 and 341.
- 21 John McDowell, 'Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?' *The Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. Vol. LII, 1978, p. 18.
- 22 See G. J. Warnock, *Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, 20 (London: MacMillan, 1967): '... if it were not the case that there existed a certain range of considerations, having to do in general with the welfare of human beings, about which most people cared very much some of the time, and cared to some extent much of the time, then not only would moral argument, however conclusive, be pointless and ineffective; moral discourse would simply not occur' (p. 71).
- 23 Bishop Joseph Butler, *Sermons* (1726), edited by W. R. Matthews (London: Bell, 1969). See the very clear discussion of this matter in Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man* (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 266-274.
- 24 McDowell, 'Virtue and Reason', p. 331.
- 25 McDowell, 'Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?', p. 21. See also his description of 'salience' in 'Virtue and Reason', pp. 344-45.
- 26 Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 18. See Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1933): 'Women have but little sense of justice... We also say of women that their social instincts are weaker than those of men, and that their capacity for the sublimation of their instincts is less' (p. 184).
- 27 Quoted by Gilligan, *op. cit.*, p. 16. from Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1929), p. 76.
- 28 Gilligan, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 173.
- 31 Mary Daly, *Pure Lust* (London: The Women's Press, 1984); see the entries in 'Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language'.
- 32 Thus Daly abandons hope for a Tillichian overcoming of dualism by means of increasing abstraction, in favour of a more gnostic, and Jungian opposition of forces. Compare Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973) in which there is a 'beyond' described in Chapters 3, 4 and 7, with *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London: The Women's Press, 1979) and *Pure Lust*, in which no such 'place' exists.
- 33 See especially Radcliffe Richards, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-29 *passim*.

- 34 Alison Jagger, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1983); see pp. 98, 107. Cf. Janet Sayers, *Biological Politics* (London: Tavistock, 1982), p. 188. This problem also seems to be characteristic of the feminist writings of Luce Irigaray, as discussed by Margaret Whitford, 'Luce Irigaray and the Female Imaginary: Speaking as a Woman', in *Radical Philosophy* 43, Summer 1986.
- 35 Frigga Haug, 'Morals also have Two Genders', *New Literary Review*, Vol. 143, Jan/Feb 1984.
- 36 For a good example, see Robert Paul Wolff, 'There's Nobody Here But Us Persons', in C. Gould and M. Wartofsky (eds.), *Women and Philosophy* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976), pp. 128-44.
- 37 See particularly Brian Easlea, *Science and Sexual Oppression* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), and *Fathering the Unthinkable* (London: Pluto Press, 1983).
- 38 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Indiapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), translated by Martin Ostwald. See Book One, section 7 in which goodness is related to function. See also Dorothy Emmet, *Rules, Roles and Relations* (London: MacMillan, 1966); Philippa Foot, 'Goodness and Choice', *The Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. VI. XXXV, 1961; and G. E. M. Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Philosophy' and 'On Brute Facts', in *Analysis*, Vol. 18, 1958.
- 39 F. H. Bradley, 'My Station and Its Duties', in *Ethical Studies*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927).
- 40 See A. C. McIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976) for a description of the history of ethics from this viewpoint. See also his argument that unless such community is restored in the modern world, morality will have lost its meaning for us. The confusion of moral perspectives in our day leaves us with no way of choosing between available alternatives without a meaningful social context. *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1982).
- 41 See Williams, *op. cit.*, ch. 2 on 'The Archimedean Point'. See also McDowell, 'Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World', in Eva Schaper (ed.), *Pleasure, Preference and Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) for a critique of this possibility.
- 42 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969) translated by G. E. M. Anscombe and Denis Paul: 'It is our acting which lies at the bottom of the language-game' (para. 204). See also Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949).
- 43 Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973). See particularly chapters 5 and 6 which illustrate these conditions of women's lives and consciousness.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 122
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 150.
- 46 Rosalind Coward, *Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 188.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 259. See also her article on 'Psychoanalysis and Patriarchal Structures' co-authored with E. Cowie and S. Lipshitz in *Papers on Patriarchy* (Lewes: Women's Publishing Collective, 1976) in which she describes more fully the acquisition of gender consciousness in children. For an anthropologist's analysis of this universal gender construction, see Sherry B. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?' in M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lampher (eds.), *Woman, Culture and Society* (California: Stanford University Press, 1974).
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 1, quoting from Althusser.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 265. See also her book, co-authored with John Ellis, *Language and Materialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), especially chapters 1 and 5 which offer a critique of humanistic reification.
- 50 Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974): '... language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men... Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product...' (pp. 50-51).
- 51 Coward, 'Re-reading Freud', *Spare Rib*, May 1978. She also criticises the limitations of Marxism for its economic determinism, which tends to yield a universalist thesis regarding the necessary ideology of women's oppression. See 'Re-thinking Marxism', *m/f* 2, 1978.
- 52 See the critiques of both Mitchell and Coward in Sayers, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-45 and Foreman, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-51.
- 53 Michèle Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 34-35.
- 54 *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36. See also the review by Howard Feather, 'Reconstructing Structural Marxism', *Radical Philosophy* 43, Summer 1986, in which similar epistemological problems are discussed with reference to Althusser, particularly p. 35.
- 55 Attributed to Virginia Woolf. See how this problem is described by Joseph McCartney, 'What Makes Critical Theory "Critical"?' *Radical Philosophy* 42, Winter/Spring 1986.
- 56 Williams, *op. cit.*, especially ch. 9, 'Relativism and Reflection'.
- 57 See my initial attempt to formulate this in 'Feminism and Moral Reasoning', *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, special issue on Women and Philosophy, June 1986.
- 58 My thinking throughout this piece has been greatly stimulated by Sabina Lovibond, *Realism and Imagination in Ethics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983). While I have not quoted directly from this work, I want to acknowledge her provocative analysis of moral epistemology and to express a hope that one day I can investigate her suggestions in a more full and direct way. My thanks also to the members of the Radical Philosophy Group for very helpful comments on the first draft of this paper, which has benefitted from their careful attention.

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