

Book Reviews

The Moral Parameters of Good Talk: A Feminist Analysis. Maryann Neely Ayim. Wilfrid Laurier Press: Waterloo, Ontario, 1997; viii + 255 pages; ISBN 0-88920-282-6; \$45.00 (cloth).

Ayim argues that speech is a form of behaviour and should be subject to moral constraints, as other forms of behaviour are. Her argument is a standard liberal one: speech that harms others justifiably may be restricted. But what harms does speech cause? Ayim begins with the empirical literature on conversation patterns: generally in mixed-sex groups, men and boys speak a great deal more than women and girls, men interrupt women much more than women interrupt men, and men control the topics of conversations. Conversational time, like all time, is limited, and men take much more than their fair share of it.

The book examines not only the dynamics of speech (who speaks and how they speak) but also the content of speech (what they say). One of the most important chapters in this book is the one on "political correctness." Here Ayim argues that considering racist or sexist language to be no more than "bad manners" involves three false assumptions: first, that all speech should be exempt from moral analysis or censure, even speech that interferes with others' freedom of expression; second, that all harms are individual, so systemic harm is impossible and social context is irrelevant; and third, that attempts to reform language are political but the status quo is apolitical.

Speech as a behaviour is not a matter of "mere etiquette," Ayim says; people who argue that all speech should be exempt from moral consideration "reduce genuinely ethical considerations to merely political ones" (184). What's "mere" about etiquette or politics, though? Of course whether we put napkins on the left or right, or the nature of the relationship between political subterritories and the federal government, are not moral matters. But how we treat others, whether in private gatherings, social institutions or the public forum, most

assuredly are moral matters. When a reader asks Miss Manners, "What am I supposed to say when I am introduced to a homosexual couple?" and Miss Manners replies, "Gentle Reader: 'How do you do?' 'How do you do?'," Miss Manners is doing ethics.¹ When we criticize racist or sexist speech because it "jeopardizes our attainment of truth" (103) or because it promotes hatred against already disadvantaged groups, our political criticisms have great moral import.

This book presents a strong argument for the claim that speech is a form of behaviour and thus is subject to moral evaluation. Ayim could have strengthened her argument further by recognizing that speech also is a matter of etiquette and politics, but that these too are behaviours and thus are moral matters.

REFERENCE

1. Judith Martin. *Miss Manners' Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior*. New York: Warner Books, 1979, pp. 67.

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FTM: Female to Male Transsexuals in Society. Holly Devor. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1997; photographs; appendix; bibliography; subject index; participant index; xxviii +695 pages; ISBN 0-253-33631-7; \$69.95.

FTM: Female to Male Transsexuals in Society, Holly Devor's contribution to the wanting literature on transsexuality, looks to a direction previously little-explored. Writing as an academic "outsider" (not transsexual herself), Devor's research is based on interviews with forty-five self-identified FTM transsexual men at various stages of transition. Her contribution is important for two reasons. First, it breaks from both autobiographical work, and a predominantly MTF focus significantly influenced by the anti-transsexual diatribe of Janice Raymond. Second, instead of a facile reliance on theorizing abstracted from the lifeworlds of transsexual