# Autonomy Reconsidered

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ABSTRACT

It is my aim, in this paper, to illustrate the restrictive nature of the ontological assumptions that give rise to an excessive focus on autonomy characteristic of much traditional moral theory. Through a discussion of the implications of good friendship, I show that a differently-conceived, relational conception of the self can lead to reflective moral practices of a sort that is consonant with feminist concerns.

RESUME

Dans cet exposé, mon but est d'illustrer la nature restrictive des présupposés ontologiques qui entraînent une attention excessive à l'autonomie. Cette attention à l'autonomie est typique d'une grande partie de la théorie traditionnelle de la morale. A travers une discussion au sujet des implications d'une amitié solide, je tente de montrer qu'il serait possible de formuler différemment un concept relationnel du moi, ce qui aboutirait à des pratiques morales réfléchies qui seraient en harmonie avec le point de vue féministe.

## 1. Introduction

The autonomous moral agent has long been the hero of philosophical moral discourse: the person—indeed, more accurately the man—whose modes of being and acting are manifestations of the achievement of moral maturity and goodness. Writings about moral development and moral education emphasize the need to structure these processes so that rational, self-conscious, morally autonomous individuals will be their products[1]; and the realization and maintenance of autonomy is widely taken to be an unchallengeable goal of moral life. All of this notwithstanding, it is my intention to dispute the value of autonomy as an overarching ideal. It is my belief that its achievement would not, and indeed could not, signal the realization of a morally and politically viable way of life, and that to posit achieved autonomy as the mark of mature moral being excludes from the scope of moral commendability many human beings whose conduct, in fact, merits moral approval. I shall suggest that a "communitarian" position analogous to one being articulated in some versions of feminist thought, originates in a mode of moral reflection preferable to autonomy-oriented traditional modes.

It may sound odd to start from an assumption that feminists are well advised to challenge the hegemony of autonomy as a moral value, for it has been a central feminist preoccupation to urge women to strive for autonomy and to support political measures deemed likely to promote autonomous female existence. It would be foolish to minimize the importance of struggles for autonomy in feminist thought and action, both early and much more recent.[2] Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* might be read as a plea for a form of female autonomy, albeit a limited form by late twentieth century standards (and a form which requires a woman to be "more like a man"). Much of contemporary feminist writing, too, could be seen as having as one of its most vital aims the articulation of a conception of autonomy, understood to involve both freedom from oppression by patriarchal structures and attitudes, and freedom to realize one's own capacities and aspirations.

Indeed, it would seem to be beyond dispute that the achievement of some measure of autonomy has to retain a place amongst feminist goals. My point is that traditional philosophical interpretations of autonomy as a value have tended to lead to an autonomy-obsession which serves no one's purposes well. Yet, the choice is not an outright one between interdependence or autonomy, conceived as oppositional terms. It is a matter of discerning how an appropriate balance is to be achieved between autonomy in its various manifestations, and communal solidarity.

## 2. Moral Autonomy: The Received View

In Kant's philosophical writings one finds the strongest statement of a position where autonomy is accorded pride of place. Here, "autonomy" is understood to refer to the exercise of the freedom of the will of a rational, self-conscious agent, to the self-determination of that will, quite apart from any object willed. This is the conception of autonomy implicit in the two pivotal claims (in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*) that the good will is the only thing good in itself; and that duty must override inclination in moral deliberation and in action based upon it.[3] The continued high esteem in which the achievement of autonomy is held, however, is not an

esteem for autonomy understood precisely as Kant understood it. In more recent moral discourse and in work on moral education, derivative connotations of independence, self-sufficiency, freedom, and the right to self-government received special emphasis. These differences in connotation are not so significant for my purposes as is the common thread of assumptions linking the various meanings. These reflect a character ideal which is neither the only possible such ideal nor one which merits unqualified approval.

In Anthony Trollope's novel, *The Warden*, the moral attitude of the zealous young reformer, John Bold, might be taken to capture something of what is implicit in Kantian, and Kantian-derivative, moral autonomy, with its inflexible rule of duty over inclination. It is Bold's mission to bring about reform in the Anglican clergy, particularly amongst those who seem to be abusing the privilege of their office for unwarranted financial gain. He includes in this campaign the Warden of Hiram's Hospital, a man whose character is of the finest, and whose comfortable financial circumstances are the consequences rather of good fortune than of deviousness. Despite Bold's friendship with the Warden, and his love for the Warden's daughter, he resolves to pursue his course single-mindedly. He asks, "Because I esteem Mr. Harding is that a reason that I should neglect a duty which I owe...? or should I give up a work which my conscience tells me is a good one, because I regret the loss of his society?" Regarding Eleanor Harding, he maintains, "if she has the kind of spirit for which I give her credit, she will not condemn me for doing what I think to be a duty. ... I cannot for her sake go back from the task which I have commenced."[4] So he embarks upon a course of action which will ruin Mr. Harding's reputation and destroy him psychologically.

Bold's actions show something of both the strengths and weaknesses of a Kantian approach. His story suggests how Kantian moral theory might in fact provide guidelines for action in "conflict of interest" situations. Strong respect for principle must be cultivated in the morally good, for this enables one to stand firm against emotional temptations, neither to abuse nor misuse one's public station or privileges for the sake of familial and/or friendly allegiance. Such principled persons would not stoop to patronage, preferential treatment, or favouritism, but would live as exemplars of the practice of impartiality required by the autonomous realization of the moral law within. This is how one might see John Bold: his principles are of the highest, adopted for the sake of goodness rather than for personal gain. He adheres strictly, and strongly, to them: inclination (affection, friendship, love) are not permitted to interfere with the performance of duty.

Despite its moral strength one might well not applaud Bold's stance. To understand why is to see some of the limitations of this view of moral life where, to quote Robert Paul Wolff, "Despite his overriding concern for moral matters, Kant never seems to have asked himself the fundamental question, what is it for one man to stand in a real relation to another man?"[5] The dismay that one might feel at John Bold's actions suggests that there could be something amiss in an unwillingness to consider the moral requirements of the personal relationships into which he has entered as freely as he has embarked upon his reformist campaign. Yet, a Kantian might applaud this aspect of it, for emotions, on Kant's view, are suffered, undergone, dissociated from rationality, and hence threatening to autonomy. It is the autonomy of reason, of rationality, that is to be realized in truly moral beings. Emotions, in the face of which one is declared merely passive, must be transcended.[6]

Even if one approaches Kantian morality on its own terms, apart from the feminist challenges it invites, it is clear that a morality which would always exalt duty over loyalties that human relationships enjoin is not a liveable morality. Although such loyalties may indeed be at the root of "conflict of interest" abuses of moral principle, it is difficult to see why it should be assumed, in such conflicts, that public projects (in Bold's case, the reformist undertaking) should, as a matter of course, prevail over private ones (his strong affective ties). Such a rule of conduct may make moral decision-making simpler; but, it does so at the expense of obscuring the complexity of a primary moral task of effecting a balance between often equally justifiable claims of duty and inclination.

Kantian moral theory views persons not only as autonomous but, as many feminist moral theorists have now argued, as moral atoms, whose central experiences do not include close personal relationships. Rather, these seem to be both anomalous, and threatening to moral integrity. This is true even of the "respect for persons" formulation of the categorical imperative. Taken together with the principle that the maxim upon which one acts must be universalisable, and often elaborated in terms of rights and duties, it requires people to deny or override any special relationships between themselves and others in making moral decisions. Such emphasis upon the rights of autonomous individuals, and a minimal consideration of responsibilities of specific human beings to, and for, one another, often produces a tension, for moral agents, between claims of impartiality and particularity.

It seems to be a curious moral requirement, particularly from a developmental point of view, that moral rights should be taken to command impartial respect. People

learn about morality, to a great extent, in terms of responsibility, care, and concern, as they owe them to, or see that they are appropriately directed toward, specific other human beings. It is odd that such a training should be expected to mature into the upholding of an ideal of impartial moral reasoning. As for the underemphasis upon self and action that goes along with this, it is not easy to see how a moral judgement made from a purely impartial stance can be conceived as one's own judgement. Acting upon such a judgement would seem to have little to do with one's own moral goodness. Yet, it is not a mark of moral slovenliness to allow that one cares about one's own moral goodness. I suspect one would be morally reprehensible if one did not.[7] In short, there is a serious discontinuity between the requirements of Kantian morality, and the prephilosophical experiences, insights, and intuitions of actual subjects.

Although an ideal of autonomy as such does not figure so prominently in utilitarian ethics as in the Kantian scheme, there is a comparable tension, for utilitarians, between claims of impartiality and particularity. Nor does it stretch utilitarianism too far to declare there to be striking affinities between utilitarians and Kantians with respect to their assumptions about the kind of being who is "the moral agent." Indeed, Mill's belief in "the individual's" capacity to know and choose what is in his own interests, and his consequent arguments against paternalism might well be taken to be premised upon a conception of "the autonomous moral agent" not unlike the Kantian one. Yet, *prima facie* one might think utilitarianism preferable to Kantian ethics where claims of impartiality as against those of particularity are at issue. For it could be argued that, in utilitarian terms, actions beneficial to friends, relations and political comrades are good in that they tend to increase one's own pleasure as the agent of such actions. This pleasure appears to lend support to the claim that there are positive duties to benefit those for whom one cares.

This, in fact, only appears to be the case. Utilitarianism, too, is based in a strong impartiality requirement, according to which it is really one's duty to act so as to produce the greatest possible general utility. Concern for particular persons benefitted or harmed is merely incidental and primarily instrumental. Relationships to such persons cannot be granted inherent value, for doing what benefits one's friends, colleagues, or country is wrong if it hinders the production of a greater good for a larger number of people. Indeed, a utilitarian might find himself (and the masculine pronoun is the appropriate one here) in the paradoxical situation where the production of benefit for strangers, or even for enemies, is more conducive to utility than any alternative course of action, even in spite of the extent to which his own displeasure at needing to do so detracts from the utility produced.[8] This utilitarian conception of persons as interchangeable units of moral action, benefit, judgement, and decision-making is closely tied to the value placed upon individualism and self-realization in the libertarian and in the German romantic traditions. For orthodox utilitarians, as long as the total utility created is great, the identities of the beneficiaries are not significant.

While it is not my intention to present a comprehensive survey of the place accorded to autonomy and its analogues throughout moral and political discourse, it is worth remarking that contractarian theories of social organization, both early and late,[9] assume that the individuals who would make and endorse such contracts would be "male, adult, economically self-supporting, and psychologically self-sufficient"[10]. Although Sartre writes from quite a different tradition and set of assumptions about man's existential choices, affinities with the emphasis upon self-making and separate self-sufficiency in the positions I have discussed are evident throughout his writings.

A first step toward rethinking the relations between moral agents and their communities involves the task of trying to effect a reconciliation between equally legitimate human requirements for autonomy and mutuality. It may help to try to view these two kinds of concerns as interwoven rather than as oppositional and conflictual; one might then be able to see the value of autonomy in a more appropriate perspective.[11]

### 3. From Ontology to Ecology

Autonomy-oriented moral theories rest upon a cluster of ontological assumptions which are as much prescriptive as descriptive. Not only do they start from an implicit descriptive premise to the effect that human beings are creatures of a sort that can sustain separate and self-sufficient existence, this same premise assumes prescriptive implications in the further assumption that the *telos* of human existence is the fullest possible realization of self-sufficiency and individuality. Such an ontological stance yields the sparsest of pictures of what it is to be human, borrowed not from one of the richest interpretations of human possibilities but from one of the thinnest. Where it is counted adequate, even for theoretical purposes, to treat human beings simply as bearers of rights, or even as rational, self-conscious agents, it is small wonder that a picture emerges of separate and oppositionally-divided individuals, clutching their rights jealously to

them, and looking upon other human beings not only as other but as alien, potentially threatening those rights by their very existence.

Concentration upon the otherness of other human beings has several consequences. First of all, the oppositional tone of the discourse suggests that people are not only different one from another, but essentially opaque to one another. Rather than starting from the perfectly plausible assumption that there might be a significant degree of commonality and mutuality, individualist ontology and the moralities derivative from it take isolation and separation to be essential starting points of human moral life.[12] At the same time, and perhaps paradoxically, such theories concentrate so much upon formal sameness in their stripped-down versions of what it is to be human that human beings—whether as bearers of rights, or as rational, self-conscious agents—emerge as virtually interchangeable units, upon the relative merits of whose claims a fairly simplistic decision-making procedure can pronounce. Assumed formal sameness and interchangeability impede the development of an adequate conceptual apparatus for coping with relevant, and often highly significant, differences between and amongst human beings; rather, such differences are set up as oppositional modes. Hence the best that such theories can allow in terms of encounters with difference is a pale, pluralistic attitude of liberal toleration: a bare recognition of difference-in-isolation which is to be tolerated but need neither be understood nor cared about.

Against this ontological backdrop it is easy to see why interdependence and cooperation are taken to be lesser modes of being than autonomous separateness. They involve an undesirable compromise of autonomy and self-sufficiency, a failure of self-reliance. The picture of human society as comprised of a random assembly of such discrete, separate individuals is of a society for which interdependence is at best manageable, when carefully regulated; at worst, it is straightforwardly threatening. To see human beings as essentially separate and self-contained seems to imply that they are not only opaque to one another but also potentially alien and alienated one from another even in their (atomistic) sameness. Social contract theory in many of its forms reflects just this view.

It seems to be beyond dispute that the human race has arrived at a historical moment at which the mode of being of the liberal individual, "pulling himself up by his own bootstraps" and pursuing self-fulfillment, cannot be advocated as one which could serve human beings well in the present (world-)political situation, face to face with the end of this species, and of all species. Out of reflection

upon this species and other species, and upon ecological interrelations both within and amongst them, one can begin to develop one potentially fruitful way of rethinking these ontological issues.[13]

Ecological reflection focuses upon relations of organisms with one another, and upon relations between organisms and their environment. By "environment" I mean not just the physical environment, nor only the present environment, but a complex network of relations within which an organism realizes, or fails to realize, its potential, be those relations historical, material, geographical, social, institutional, or other. In looking at how an organism, at any moment in its history, reflects its current state of accommodation both of and to such relations, I mean to emphasize the participation of organisms, whose choices are relationally structured, and who sometimes can themselves have a shaping effect upon relational structures. Where discussion is of human organisms, this participatory mode contrasts strongly with the removed stance of an ideal, impartial observer whose agency, too, reflects this separateness.

With its biological origins, ecological discourse works from the assumption that there is continuous process and change within its objects of study. Its use is intended to dispel any suggestions of stasis. Hence this kind of ontological reflection does not have as its aim the articulation of an alternative essentialist account of what it is to be human, which would denounce, yet run parallel to, autonomy-centered ontology. Rather, it is reflection both upon implications, for organisms, of creating and sustaining an environment conducive to realizing good ways of living. (Such reflective practice can profitably be engaged in even in the absence of a fully-elaborated conception of what is to count as goodness as it might be attributed of a way of living.)

Suffice it to say by way of a beginning, though, that the optimal development of any organism, from the simplest to the most sophisticated, is dependent upon a complex of appropriate ecological conditions and is influenced positively or adversely by changes in these conditions, just as changes in organisms, reciprocally, influence those same conditions. Secondly, in putting the case ecologically, I am expressing the belief both that it is vital to arrive at a reshaped conception of the kinds of community that it might be best for human beings to inhabit, and that viably reshaped conceptions cannot be developed solely within the terms of efficiency-oriented, benefit-maximizing ethics, whose agents and beneficiaries alike are separate individuals standing up for their rights. Implicit in the doubts I have expressed about the overarching value of autonomy

is a conviction that a moral system for which moral obligation is binding only when it is autonomously contracted into has no place for a conception of a common good; rather, it can allow only the aggregate of individual goods, a whole that is no greater than the sum of its parts.[14]

In appealing to an ecological analogy as a starting point for thinking differently about human ontology and moral agency, my point is to indicate how inextricably the factors that shape and influence any one life are interconnected. While I concentrate upon aspects of human relationship in what follows, it must be borne in mind that this is a matter of focus for purposes of this discussion. Human interaction cannot, in practice, be separated out or understood apart from the material, environmental, historical, personal (both conscious and unconscious), and other factors that shape interacting persons and interactions themselves. Neither can all of these factors be explored at once.

It should be noted at this point, however, that although this ecological metaphor seems to have considerable heuristic value for opening a new perspective on ontological issues, it is clearly not without drawbacks. The most serious of these would seem to be that ecosystems always survive at the expense of some of their members, and that concentration upon community commonly results in suppression, if not annihilation, of some of the (minority) members of that community. It is for this reason, above all, that autonomy needs to retain a central place even within an ecological picture: that the tension between ecological and autonomy-preserving concerns needs to be regarded as a productive tension, to be maintained rather than ignored or dissolved.

Human beings who would emerge as the subjects—though not as the heroes—of an ecology-derived discourse can perhaps most fruitfully be characterised (following Caroline Whitbeck) as "relational and historical being[s] whose creativity and moral integrity are both developed and realized in and through relationships and practices"[15]. Thinking in terms of relations and historical experiences (both one's own and those of one's "community") as constitutive of what each person is as a continually evolving human self allows one to see each life as a nexus of many other life-lines and experiences, all partially separate and partially interrelated and interdependent. Speaking of creativity and integrity together shows that neither of these is a static concept but that they, too, evolve in a constantly interactive process. Human beings are never quite what they were or will be; and this fact is as much dependent upon their interaction, both communal and environmental, as it is upon their own nature, to the

extent that it makes sense to refer to such a thing apart from its constitutive circumstances.

The core of the ontological position Whitbeck articulates is constituted by a self-other relation "between beings who are in some respects analogous,...[where] the scope and limits of that analogy...are something to be explored in each case" (p. 75). The point is to approach the fact of human interdependence to discern its enabling possibilities rather than to concentrate upon the constraints it might present. It is possible that, out of such an approach there could emerge a realization that "sameness" and "difference" need neither be viewed as polarities in a dichotomy, nor be translated into superiority and inferiority.[16] They might work as interactional, reciprocally defining modes, points in the history of human relations, rather than terms in opposition to one another.

While I see considerable promise in this relational picture of human ontology Whitbeck proposes to develop, I am less convinced by her endorsement of Sara Ruddick's view[17] that "maternal thinking" can serve as a model for this new self-other relation. One can endorse Whitbeck's claim that masculinist, patriarchal relations are standardly modelled upon individualistic, autonomy-oriented ontological assumptions and allow that a potentially more ecologically valuable way of conceiving what it is to be human can be modelled upon the "liberation of women's relationships and practices" (p. 79) without having to take the further step of making mothering activity the central (and essential?) such practice. If the point is to derive feminist reflection upon ontology-morality from modes of relationship traditionally best practiced by women, then close personal friendships would seem to be much better candidates, and far less culturally charged. The fact that men, too, sometimes experience such friendship—if perhaps (stereotypically) infrequently—might be taken as a reason in favour of believing that some insights can be gained from thinking about women's friendships in their various manifestations, since the prospects of developing a more broadly relevant ontological point of view on this basis would then be better. That they do not even implicitly exclude women who do not mother, or who do not mother well, is a further point in their favour. The rarity of genuine friendships whose core is such as to foster a "(mutual) realization of people" (Whitbeck, p. 65) is surely no greater than that of the clear and unproblematic mothering relation Whitbeck (with Ruddick) admires.

The value of such friendships for understanding possibilities of reciprocal self-other relations can be affirmed even in spite of the belief, central to psychoanalytic prac-

tice, that women's friendships with other women may, in fact, tend to replicate features of mother-child relations. It would be difficult to designate any close relationship that is wholly free from replication of some aspects of a person's primary relationships. Friendship, at least, is distanced from that core, and may sometimes afford more readily accessible forms of coming to terms with its residues, if only in that there is less to be undone at the outset.

Friendship takes many forms and, again, I do not want to offer an essentialist account of that it must be if insights are to be gained from reflection upon it. Some of its common features can be mentioned, if only to be revised or disputed. In friendships at their best, a balance between autonomous separateness and appropriate interdependence is often effected and maintained by the mutuality of a caring, trusting relationship between the participants. Established friendships tend to be able to cope, over time, with fluctuations in degrees of intimacy and in levels of dependence and independence. That this is taken to be one of the better forms of human relationship is manifest in the laudatory tone of pronouncements to the effect that X is not just Y's mother, but also her friend; that A and B are not only lovers, or spouses, but friends. By contrast with mothering, friendship often seems to be able to admit of degree without engendering guilt; and it can encompass aspects of parenting and other forms of caregiving without being essential to them, or required of them. Though such relationships will not always be characterisable as friendships, they may sometimes be, and chances are that they will be better so. Friendship may be able to accommodate its own growth and to contribute to the growth of its participants, often by coming to terms with ambivalences and ambiguities akin to those implicit in mother-child relations, but with a potential at least of being less emotionally fraught. This is a fertile locus for development of trust, and for coming to understand trust in considerable "semantic depth."[18] Indeed, it may be an even more promising locus than the mother-child relationship because in friendship there are often, from the beginning, symmetrical possibilities which are unlikely to exist in quite the same way between mother and child in view of their evident inequality, at least in the early years. Hence in friendship a productive sameness-and-difference interplay may be more readily possible because the relationship is not necessarily rooted in so obvious a difference. Although intimate friendship has long been taken to be a women's practice, and devalued accordingly, the fact that there have also been great friendships between men, and between men and women, might allow it to have the heuristic value claimed for maternal thinking with none of the accompanying rhetoric needed to show how men (and childless women) can also be mothers.

I think friendship would better serve the purpose, then, of designating a kind of relationship that could provide the starting point for a feminist approach to ontology. Nor is it necessary to search for an essential kernel of what friendship is to be able to derive from experience of the myriad practices that warrant the label (if perhaps only provisionally) some sense of how autonomy-obsession might be displaced. Some characteristics of these practices could be extended, by analogy, to serve as shaping ideals for less personal human interaction, particularly when these ideals are pursued in conjunction with ecological thinking about the creation of social situations in which human well-being could be realized. I have in mind something like this: one might think of relationships that constitute human lives metaphorically, as patterns of concentric circles, many of which intersect with relationships that constitute other lives, and one might try to see whether the outer circles, representing more formal, less affectively central relationships in one's life, would work on an analogy with more central ones. For those accustomed to the autonomy-centered mode, this would likely involve a radical rethinking of their sense of self and of others, whose primary manifestation might be in a working away from defensive thinking both about who one is, and about how one should act. Such a reorientation might work to undermine the long-standing assumption that there are two utterly distinct kinds of relationships in human lives: private, emotional, personal ones, and public, formal, impersonal ones. These tend to be regarded as separate kinds of relationships belonging to different parts of a life and having relatively few features in common in terms of one's appropriate attitudes to, and modes of participation in, them. This contributes to an assumption that there is and, indeed, should be a split between one's private and public self, with the projects of the latter accorded greater value. This is well illustrated by the story of John Bold.

Part of what communitarian ecological thinking would seem to enjoin is a dissolution of the public/private dichotomy. My concentric circles metaphor is meant to suggest how this might be approached. Core, affective, private relationships seem to be some of the factors most centrally constitutive of human selves both in their earliest developmental stages and in all of their later moments. It seems reasonable to suppose that, if one were not constrained by alleged ethical demands to separate oneself in one's public life from these relationships and the responses they evoke, one might permit them to play a role in shaping one's public attitudes and responses as well. This would involve approaching more public aspects of one's life with a less intimate version of the open and trusting

characteristics of friendship, working from a presumption that mutual understanding is more, rather than less, likely, though prepared to think differently should the situation clearly require it. Hence one could cultivate receptiveness to possibilities of commonality and trust in less central relationships that would contrast sharply with the zealously maintained separateness of autonomous being. In this context it would make perfect sense to assert, as Whitbeck does, that "the notion of moral responsibilities that go with relationships... [is] a fundamental moral notion" (p. 66). Relationships, thus understood, would be ecological in the broad sense I have indicated above, and seeing them thus might allow for a fruitful continuity of thinking between this more specifically ethical enquiry and broader political concerns, as these are embodied, for example, in the ecology movement itself, in the peace movement, and more wide-ranging socialist concerns about how best to create a liveable environment for human, and other, life.

## 4. Reflective Practice

In Trollope's novel it is perhaps a coincidence that it is a woman—his sister—who dissuades John Bold from the dogged pursuit of his reformist project, urging him to acknowledge the moral claims of his loves and allegiances. It is out of just such a seemingly coincidental gender differentiation in moral response that Carol Gilligan has developed the thesis that, in moral matters, male and female agents speak in different voices from one another.[19] Indeed, one might envisage presenting the John Bold dilemma to Gilligan's subjects; and tabulators of the results might perhaps find male subjects tending to respond as Bold himself does, female subjects tending to draw attention to considerations his sister finds more important.

Gilligan's project is to reinterpret the results of Lawrence Kohlberg's tests designed to measure moral maturity. She is persuaded that the fact that female subjects have tended consistently to score lower on these tests than male subjects can be attributed to a problem with the tests themselves rather than with female moral responses. Indeed, receptive readings of these responses, open to their nuances, lead one to realize that standardly female and standardly male responses to these tests differentiate themselves from one another partly in consequences of working from different conceptions both of self-other relations, and of persons who participate in those relations. Gilligan does not claim explicitly that these differences turn upon different evaluations of achieved autonomy; but, it is the autonomous endorsement of universalisable moral principles that characterizes the responses of those who achieve the highest Kohlberg score. The female responses she elaborates manifest a greater concern with relationship, connectedness, and caring than with independent self-sufficiency. In making audible the judgements of a different moral voice, Gilligan observes that although, statistically, it is women who have tended to speak in this way, this can be explained to a great extent by the historically contingent structures of mother-dominated Western child-rearing practices.[20] Although these two moral voices have tended to be marked "masculine" and "feminine," this is not a matter of biological necessity, as she sees it; both voices are available to women and men.

Gilligan does not propose an alternative feminine moral theory to replace traditional autonomy-oriented ones, nor are the theoretical underpinnings of her work such as to make a development of this sort possible. One of the values of the project is to indicate from another perspective that psychological-ontological assumptions about autonomy as the "natural" end product of human developmental processes are indeed arbitrary. Once this is seen to be so, it is clear, again, that the hegemony of moral positions developed around this core is an assumed rather than a natural hegemony.

At this point, however, it is not my intention to draw together these strands of thought in order to sketch out a new, care-oriented moral theory. I have indicated some of the limitations inherent in autonomy-oriented "malestream" theories and have suggested reasons for these limitations in some of the ontological presuppositions with which they work. I have proposed that there might be a viable approach to moral reflection to be developed out of ecological thinking about relations of human beings to one another and to the world, taking values realized in good friendships to be, in some sense, a source of understanding. I am not convinced that this would, or should, result in the development of a moral theory which, implicitly or explicitly, celebrates and grants centre stage to the different voice whose worthiness Gilligan affirms. Despite her insistence that this is a voice in which all can speak, its stereotypical female associations are still too strong for one to be sure that granting it the main, or even an equal, speaking part would not risk simply celebrating "the feminine" with many of its negative connotations still in place, creating a new dichotomy whose terms need constantly to be circumnavigated, or endorsing the age-old complimentarity thesis.

Indeed, any celebration of traditionally feminine modes which aims to revalue them yet leave them intact risks losing sight of the constraints commonly attendant upon their manifestation. Where connectedness is the value in

question, it is important to remember that, at least in the past, women's concentration upon family and community has limited their ability to contest exploitation, contributing in its own way to their powerlessness and oppression. Seeking to juxtapose an ethics of caring and responsibility against an ethics of rights and justice offers few prospects, I suspect, of breaking out of the dichotomies (for example, between duty and inclination, public and private) central to traditional moral thinking. From there it would be a small step back into the view that the former is female.morality, and, therefore, represents the (lesser) concerns of women, the latter male morality representing the (more serious) concerns of men. Women might, once again—or still—be charged with the moral guardianship of society, left to take care of its softer, more emotional requirements.

It would be more valuable for these two strands of moral thinking to be woven into a larger pattern of reflection upon how best to live with other human beings and within certain kinds of environment, so as to create ways of developing and recognizing a wider range of moral considerations and values. I am not convinced that the aim of such reflection should be that of constructing a new, alternative moral theory in which lesser principles are derivable from more general or universal ones according to a strictly-conceived theoretical structure. In fact, perhaps one of the broader and at the same time more radical effects of Gilligan's work, and that of other feminist moral thinkers, is to suggest that the moral theories close off more possibilities of reflection and understanding than they open for consideration.[21] To cast doubt upon the value of moral theories, though, is to claim more space for reflective practice, the value of which is perhaps obscured by theories which pose as the products of completed reflection, but serve, rather, to foreclose it. The point is, as Annette Baier puts it so well, to explore different ways of being moral philosophers.[22]

In the kinds of reflective practice one might take to characterize these ways of being, certain principles and values could be central and might often act as guiding and/or regulating principles. In view of the ontology I would take to be at its core, it is clear that values such as trust, kindness, responsiveness and responsibility, honesty and care would figure prominently. In some circumstances efficiency-maximizing and autonomy-promoting values might seem to be more appropriately fostered. So it would be an equally important part of this altered perspective on moral matters to consider whether, or to what extent, the view that different values are appropriate to different situations really is the heresy that moral theories, with their monolithic structures, have long assumed it to be.[23]

The ecological orientation I would envisage for reflective moral practice should serve to ensure that it does not dissolve into an anything goes, *ad hoc* approach to moral matters. It would leave considerable scope for trial and error, in consequence of what certain practices and responses could be discernible as not conducive to the production of environmental (in the widest sense) conditions that enable people to live well together. Virginia Held, for example, in *Rights and Goods*, proposes that what might well be needed in moral inquiry is "something comparable to but not the same as the encounter with experience by which scientific theories are tested"[24]. With reference to such testing procedures, some practices might be taken, tentatively, to be more appropriate than others as ways of working toward the creation of good environments, both human and "physical." It is often easier (perhaps on a loose analogy with some sort of falsifiability theory) to see the inappropriateness of certain practices than it is to see which ones would, unequivocally, be best. Developing accounts of how people should and should not conduct their lives—at least for now, in circumstances such as these—is a little like unravelling a detective story: often it is abundantly clear how things could/should not be long before one knows how they were, or should be.

Moral practice of this sort should be able to encompass an acknowledgement that human beings always make choices from a certain specific position *vis-a-vis* other persons, within certain environmental circumstances, and that there is no removed, God's-eye vantage point from which to pass judgement upon them. In so doing, it would maintain a continuity with moral experiences, which tend to be filtered out by ideal, impartial theories for which autonomy itself, in another of its connotations, might be taken to entail freedom from the contingencies of circumstance. Although reflective moral practice may well be a more modest endeavour than theory construction, it seems to have the potential to afford greater possibilities of accommodating some of the subtleties of the moral lives of actual, gendered, historically located human beings for whom the traditionally autonomous, impartial moral agent has come to be seen as a seriously flawed character.

## NOTES

1. The writings of Emile Durkheim, Lawrence Kohlberg, R.S. Peters and Jean Piaget are typical in this respect.
2. Zillah Eisenstein's reference to the "universal feminist claim that woman is an independent being (from man)," and her observation that this claim is "premised on the eighteenth-century liberal conception of the independent and autonomous self" will be acceptable without challenge to large numbers of feminist thinkers and activists. Zillah Eisenstein. *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism.* New York: Longmans, 1981, p. 4.
3. As Kant puts it, "The will is therefore not merely subject to the law,

but it is so subject that it must be considered as also *making the law* for itself and precisely on this account as first of all subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author)." Immanuel Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, translated and analysed by H.J. Paton. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964, pp. 98-99.

4. Anthony Trollope. *The Warden*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1962, pp. 54-56.

5. Robert Paul Wolff. *The Autonomy of Reason*. New York: Harper and Row, 1973, p. 15.

6. In this connection, it is worth noting Genevieve Lloyd's demonstration of the "maleness" of reason itself, defined as it has been throughout the history of philosophy by exclusion of everything that is associated with, or believed to constitute, the feminine. Genevieve Lloyd. *The Man of Reason*. London: Methuen, 1984.

7. In the foregoing discussion I am indebted to O.J. Flanagan, Jr., and J.E. Adler in their paper "Impartiality and Particularity," *Social Research*, Vol. 50, No. 3, October 1983.

8. In much of this discussion of utilitarianism I am indebted to Susan Sherwin in her paper "Ethics: Towards a Feminist Approach," *Canadian Women Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Spring 1985.

9. This is true of the early social contract theories developed by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, as well as John Rawls' more recent version of the theory, elaborated in *A Theory of Justice*.

10. Virginia Held. *Rights and Goods*. New York: Macmillan, The Free Press, 1984, p. 75.

11. It is worth noting that, while an excessively heteronomous person might be described as credulous, gullible, compliant, passive, submissive, overdependent, or servile, it is difficult to find a term to refer to excessive autonomy. John Benson suggests that "solipsism" might do, or "arrogant self-sufficiency." John Benson. "Who is the Autonomous Man?," *Philosophy*, Vol. 58, 1983, p. 5. The list of terms to describe an excessively autonomous person is Benson's as well.

12. On the ontological level, this gives rise to the view that there is indeed a problem about "other minds" that, rather than taking shared modes of being as a starting point for the development of moral theroy, the onus is upon one to demonstrate that it is reasonable to take other human beings to be thinking, feeling creatures, as much like oneself as different.

13. Some parts of my discussion of ecological thinking, and some of the following discussion of Caroline Whitbeck's work and of the friendship model, appear in virtually the same form, though differently framed, in my "Second Persons," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplementary Vol. 13, forthcoming.

14. An ecological concern is adumbrated in Alastair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981) where he writes about the loss of human community as a place where human beings can flourish. MacIntyre deplores individualistic self-preoccupation, urging that human beings are not, and probably cannot be, self-making, but help to create and sustain each other. While the conception of the virtues to which he believes human beings should return is static and perhaps excessively conservative, there is in his work something of a move toward acknowledging the importance of human interdependence which I would take to characterize ecological thinking.

15. Caroline Whitbeck. "Feminist Ontology: A Different Reality," in Carol Gould, editor, *Beyond Domination*. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Allenheld, 1983, p. 66.

16. I am thinking, here, of the implications of Jane Flax's observation that "As long as patriarchy exists, differences will inevitably be translated into relations of dominance and submission, superiority and inferiority." Jane Flax. "Mother-Daughter Relationships: Psychodynamics, Politics and Philosophy," in H. Eisenstein and A. Jardine, editors, *The Future of Difference*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1985, p. 37.

17. Ruddick's view is elaborated in her "Maternal Thinking," in *Feminist Studies*, Summer 1980. My reservations about this position are explained in my "Second Persons."

18. This is Mark Platt's concept, elaborated in his *Ways of Meaning*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.

19. The position I refer to is developed in her book, *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982. I introduce her position here with the claim that men and women speak in different moral voices rather than adhering to Gilligan's own formulation, where women are said to speak in a different voice—presumably from men's. The rephrasing is important for two reasons: first, it catches the symmetry of the relation of difference. If women speak in a different voice from men then clearly men, too, speak in a different voice from women. Secondly, and concomitantly, it dispels any residual impression that it is the male voice which constitutes the norm, from which the female voice is declared to deviate.

20. In her elaboration of these points, Gilligan draws particularly upon Nancy Chodorow's position, developed in *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1979. For an account of how such practices contribute to the creation of "autonomous man" see Chapter 9, "Mother-Monopolized Child Rearing" of Isaac Balbus' *Marxism and Domination*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982.

21. I am thinking here of Annette Baier's observations to this effect in her paper "Doing Without a Moral Theory?" in her *Postures of the Mind: Essays on Mind and Morals*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

22. Baier, p. 232.

23. Virginia Held, for example, maintains that the form of moral reflection for which she is arguing in *Rights and Goods* "can be plausible only if one's conception of morality includes both deontological and teleological components and allows for different resolutions of tensions between egoistic and communal claims in different domains. A pure Kantian, a pure utilitarian, a pure egoist, and a pure communitarian would find the analysis...hard to reconcile with his or her morality." (p. 35).

24. Held, p. 59.

# Thetis

i remember the sixties
all those long haired draft dodgers
all those sons of Thetis
knowing (however unconsciously)
that a way to avoid killing
a way to stop making war
is to become women
(however incompletely)

Chris Wind
Ontario