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Editor

# Feminist Ethics and Social and Political Philosophy: Theorizing the Non-Ideal

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*Cover illustration*: Nancy Spero, "Black and the Red III", 1994 (detail). Handprinted and printed collage on paper. 22 panels, 50×245 cm each. Installation view, Malmö Konsthall, Sweden. Private collection. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York. Photo by David Reynolds. The work of Nancy Spero (b.1926), artist, activist and feminist, has focused on diverse historical, mythical and contemporary cultural representations of women since the 1970's.

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–Lisa Tessman

Some portions of chapter eight were published in 2008 by Eva Feder Kittay as 'Ideal Theory Bioethics and the Exclusion of People with Severe Cognitive Disabilities' in *Naturalized Bioethics: Toward Responsible Knowing and Practice* edited by Hilde Lindemann, Marian Verkerk, and Margaret Walker (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), and are reprinted here with permission.

*Landscapes* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), a monograph called *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (Oxford University Press, 2005), and various articles and book chapters. She is currently working on a book that focuses on the dilemmatic character of moral life.

# Introduction

**Lisa Tessman**

This volume picks out, from within the wider field of feminist philosophy, works that focus on the ethical, the social, and the political—whether these are conceived as overlapping or as distinct but interrelated realms—and that understand the ethical, social, and political questions that concern feminists as questions about a non-ideal, actual world, and more specifically, about an actual world that is non-ideal in at least one particular way: it is marked by features of oppression. Some of the authors consider the relation between ethics and politics, some situate themselves explicitly within one or the other of the subfields of ethics and of social and political philosophy, and others cross over or combine these subfields, presuming a strong connection between them. Additionally, each of the chapters in this volume either presents theoretical reflections on the significance of non-idealizing as an approach to feminist ethics and/or social and political philosophy and on the implications of non-idealizing for a theory's assumptions about background conditions or about the moral and/or political subject, or serves as an instance of work that is rooted in actual, non-ideal conditions, and that, as such, is able to consider some of the pressing problems that arise under such conditions.

## 1 Feminist Ethics and Feminist Social and Political Philosophy

When I was first asked to edit this volume and learned that it was to cover both feminist ethics and feminist social and political philosophy, my initial response was[1]: these are perhaps the two largest 'subfields' of feminist philosophy, one of which (social and political thinking) dominated feminist thinking/philosophy before and when such thinking first entered the academy, so why try to cover both of these extremely prolific areas in one volume? I wondered if I might edit a volume solely on feminist ethics, and leave a volume on feminist social and political philosophy to someone else. However, the division of the volumes having already been decided, this was not an option. As it turns out, I am glad that I was deterred from separating feminist ethics and feminist social and political philosophy, for in the process of putting this volume together I have been reminded of and have come to more fully appreciate how importantly tied ethics, social, and political philosophy are or can be

for feminists, as well as how rich the possibilities are for theorizing the relationship between morality and politics in a volume that combines the subfields of ethics and social and political philosophy. What the relationship is (or should be) between feminist ethics and feminist social and political philosophy is an interesting question, and I hope that the chapters that take up this question directly and the chapters that implicitly convey a certain understanding of this relationship will lead the reader to see this relationship complexly.

In my own view, some of the complexity can be developed by rethinking the implications of (and perhaps reaffirming) the phrase 'the personal is political' by considering whether and when it is also the case that 'the ethical is political'; the process through which we feminists—or we as feminists—aim to criticize, transform, produce, endorse and enact ethical values must be politicized. In the phrase 'the personal is political,' *politicizing* a (hitherto solely personal) practice is understood to entail at least an element of publicizing the practice and an element of comprehending the practice as connected to the operations of power.[2] In politicizing, one exposes a practice to public scrutiny, that is, one moves the site of potential critical viewing of a practice from the private sphere to a public site (though not necessarily to the site of a formal political institution such as a legislature or even to the site of a public of people understood only in roles related to formal political institutions, such as the role of citizen). There are two advantages of publicity: (1) the publicly viewed practice can be evaluated by all those sharing the same public site, thus increasing the potential for critical thinking and making it possible for formerly uncritical practitioners to be confronted, and to have to reevaluate or at least defend their practice; (2) the publicity of a formerly personal/private practice also facilitates critical viewing of the practice because, revealed in public, the practice can be seen as of-a-kind with others' formerly personal/private practices, such that patterns are discovered; perceiving these patterns allows feminists to connect practices to the operations of power, including operations of power that are systemically arranged, such as capitalism, male dominance, and white supremacy. To 'politicize' a practice, then, is both to expose it to publicity with its associated potential for critique and contestation, and to understand its relationship to (systemic) operations of power. Politicization of (what are revealed to be) oppressive practices is a crucial part of the feminist struggle against gender oppression, and oppression more generally.

Is the ethical political (or can, or ought, the ethical be politicized) in this way? This depends not only on one's understanding of the political but also on one's understanding of ethics. I favor a conception of ethics that allows me to answer in the affirmative: ethics should at least in many cases be politicized; feminists in particular should in many cases politicize the ethical. What my conception of ethics permits me to mean by this is that feminists should participate in the critical production and transformation of morality through political processes. Politicization can only be thought of as a way of critically producing and transforming morality if morality is the sort of thing that can be produced and transformed by human processes. If one understands morality not as something that endures unchanging and unaffected by actual, situated human practices, but rather as something that is created and changed through human processes, then politicization counts as one of the processes through which moral practices can be (critically) shaped, a way that I would suggest it behooves feminists to embrace precisely because of the crucial role that politicization plays in undermining oppression. If on the other hand moral facts are taken to be true or false independent of actual, situated human practices—whether descending from God or existing in a noumenal realm accessible through pure reason or even determined by the *telos* of humans as a natural kind—then the political struggle over ethical values degenerates into a contest to show who has gotten the independently existing moral facts right. Believing oneself to have the correct moral facts has tempted even feminists—it is, after all, a big stick to wield and a difficult one to relinquish—but I would propose that the political process through which consideration of moral practices should take place ought to be conceived as a process of publicly critiquing, producing and transforming morality, not a process of determining who has knowledge of already existing, unchangeable moral facts.



Thus the 'naturalizing' trend that has captured at least some feminist ethicists[3]—and that influences this volume's theme of non-ideal theorizing—offers a way of conceiving of ethics that supports my claim that the ethical can and often should be politicized. In saying this, I hope to be extending the work of feminists such as Margaret Urban Walker (1998/2007, 2003), whose naturalized approach to ethics highly informs the account of morality that I have just given. For Walker, the ethical is clearly social. She notes that 'morality is a naturally occurring structure of all human social groups' (2003, 108), and that 'morality itself consists in practices' (1998, 14), insisting that 'morality is not socially modular' (1998, 17), that is, that it 'cannot be extricated from other social practices' (1998, 17). Understanding what morality is thus requires inquiries into the actual practices of people in moral communities and into the moral understandings that people have of their practices. But a critical, and not merely descriptive, step is also necessary, a step in which members of a moral community question whether their 'understandings constitute a way of life that is not only "how we live" but also "how to live," a way worthy of people's allegiance, effort, restraint, or sacrifice' (2003, 109). For Walker, the key critical tool for deciding whether 'how we live' is 'how to live' is 'transparency testing.' Transparency testing can expose a practice (and a moral community's understanding of the practice) as lacking transparency if, through testing, people come to see that 'our way of life in reality betrays our shared understandings, or if these understandings turn out to be driven by deception, manipulation, coercion, or violence directed at some of us by others, where all are nonetheless supposed to "share" in this purported vision of the good' (2003, 109). In failing a transparency test, a practice loses the trust of the practitioners, and the practices thus 'lose their *moral* authority' (2003, 109; italics in the original). The critical work of 'testing' morality enables the moral community to reject some practices, reshape others, and see the need for new practices; since this testing leads to a loss of the moral authority of practices that require oppression, domination, and other misuses of power, this critical work is feminist.

While Walker undoubtedly affirms that morality is *social*—it consists of social practices and is transformed through critical social processes—she does not emphasize politicization or speak of the negotiation of moral understandings as a *political* process.[4] I propose that the political realm is a site of contestation that is

indispensable for feminist attempts to critically shape morality; it is a site where moral understandings can be shifted through a process that has a chance at being more democratic and potentially more powerful than processes that take place within less public venues that may be described as 'moral communities.' Being less optimistic than Walker is about the tendency of members of social groups to lose trust in their practices (especially when they are the beneficiaries of these practices, as, say, men are of practices of male domination) even when these practices are revealed as inconsistent with their own professed values (such as egalitarianism), I believe that the sort of contestation that characterizes political struggle and that becomes strong in times of political movements is required in order for significant liberatory change to take place. The public scrutiny and contestation offered by the political, and—when democratic norms actually function in the political realm—the egalitarian practices that formal political structures can support, are important factors for feminist critique. The problem—particularly visible when one considers the other thematic of this volume, namely non-ideal theorizing—is that actual, available political venues tend to be far from egalitarian or inclusive. It is part of the work of feminists to make them more so, while continuing to point to their shortcomings. The suggestion that one ought to 'politicize' something must not convey the false impression that the political realm one would thereby enter actually conforms to any ideal(ized) model of the political.

While I have argued for connecting morality and politics—and connecting feminist ethics and feminist social and political philosophy as fields of study—it may be that while many feminists see feminist ethics and feminist social and political philosophy as highly connected, different ones of us have different entry points—emphasizing either ethics or politics—and may try to claim priority for one or the other in cases of conflict. Ethical and political commitments may conflict when one's commitment to a particular moral practice is *not* in fact endorsed or affirmed through a political process that one *does* endorse. Democratic politics can be extremely frustrating: it does not always yield what one wants it to. In such cases, feminists face the prospect of having to forego moral practices and moral understandings that are precious from a feminist perspective (and that may be the condition of certain moral subjects' capacity to participate meaningfully in politics), but that cannot (yet) be insisted upon without violating certain political values such as the value of freedom at the core of democratic practices. It is here that the political theorists and the ethicists amongst us may have different instincts.[5] But the fact that there are conflicts between what are in some cases incommensurable values—whether these values are all cast as moral values or whether some are moral and some are political values[6] —is inevitable in non-ideal(ized) worlds, which will typically be characterized by highly dilemmatic conditions.

## 2 Theorizing the Non-Ideal

The value of a non-idealizing theoretical approach, and its relationship to feminist theorizing, has become more widely recognized in recent feminist work.[7] It is advocated, for instance, in Charles Mills' '"Ideal Theory" as Ideology' (2004), where he



refers to non-idealizing approaches as befitting of feminist and critical race theory.[8] Mills' claim is that engaging in a certain sort of idealizing—theorizing that relies 'on idealization to the exclusion, or at least marginalization, of the actual' (2004, 166)—constitutes an ideological move that makes it all the more difficult to understand the workings of oppression and to transform actual, non-ideal, unjust societies into more just societies. He writes: 'the so-called ideal theory more dominant in mainstream ethics is in crucial respects obfuscatory and can indeed be thought of as in part *ideological*, in the pejorative sense of a set of group ideas that reflect and contribute to perpetuating illicit group privilege' (2004, 164; italics in the original).

Mills distinguishes first between the sense of the 'ideal' in which all of normative ethics invokes ideals—which he calls 'ideal-as-normative'—and the sense of 'ideal' in which an ideal is a model (he calls this 'ideal-as-model') (2004, 164). Normative ideals can themselves be problematic, and as Mills points out particular normative concepts, for example the normative ideals of 'purity' and 'autonomy,' have to be examined for their ideological origins or historical (ab)uses (2004, 174–175); however, it is not the mere having of normative ideals, but rather the having of wrong or misguided (and sometimes ideologically informed) normative ideals for which feminist thinkers need to be on guard.[9]

Mills sets aside the possible problems with the 'ideal-as-normative' to explore the uses of the 'ideal-as-model.' There are two senses in which an ideal can be a model. In the first sense, which Mills calls 'ideal-as-descriptive-model,' the ideal is a simplified and abstracted representation of something based on its most important features. While simplifying and abstracting from features of something, however, an ideal-as-descriptive-model is still a representation consisting of features of *actual* instances of what it is modeling. One does not choose which features of something to include and which to omit from an ideal-as-descriptive-model on the basis of how good or desirable or perfect a feature may be, but rather on the basis of how accurately that feature captures what the thing being modeled is actually like. To create an ideal-as-descriptive-model of a grade school classroom in the small city I live in, one should probably include in the description the fact that some of the children regularly arrive at school hungry. Contrast this with what Mills calls an ideal-as-idealized-model, which is an exemplar of what something should be like, or would be like if it were perfect, a perfect instance of a thing of its kind (for instance, perfectly just, perfectly suited for learning, or even, since the 'should' need not always be understood in moral terms, perfectly designed for the purpose of torture [see 2004, 165]). In an ideal-as-idealized-model of a grade school classroom (the purpose of which is presumably to enable the education of children), none of the children would sit at their desks distracted by hunger.

Mills is concerned with the 'gap between [a phenomenon *P*] and the ideal, and correspondingly between ideal-as-descriptive-model (an ideal—in the sense of accurate—model of how *P* actually works) and ideal-as-idealized-model (an ideal—in the sense of an exemplar—model of how *P* should work)' (2004, 165). This gap is a matter of concern because ideal theorists assume that one can draw exclusively or primarily on an ideal-as-idealized-model in order to reach an understanding of actual phenomena. Mills points out that the question of whether an ideal-as-idealized-model is helpful for 'trying to understand the workings of an actual *P*'

will 'depend on how closely the actual *P* in question approximates the behavior of an ideal *P*' (2004, 165). The most privileged members of society are likely to 'have an experience that comes closest to that ideal and so experience the least cognitive dissonance between it and reality, ideal-as-idealized-model and ideal-as-descriptive-model' (2004, 170). This serves the ideological purpose of making the experience of the oppressed seem aberrant, and of steering ethical, social, and political theory away from examining, coming to understand, and facilitating resistance to actual structures of oppression.

Ideal theory strictly avoids descriptions of the actual. Thus, for instance, an ideal theorist might stipulate moral subjects who behave as independent social atoms rather than as dependent and interdependent members of families and communities, who are equal with respect to one another rather than positioned in relations of dominance and subordination or in relations of dependency, who have 'completely unrealistic capacities attributed to them—unrealistic even for the privileged minority, let alone those subordinated in different ways, who would not have had an equal opportunity for their natural capacities to develop, and who would in fact typically be disabled in crucial respects' (2004, 166). Thus focused on idealized moral subjects acting under background conditions that are presumed not to have been impacted by a history of oppression or by the ongoing effects of oppression, ideal theory not surprisingly yields a prescription or a map for reaching normative ideals that is at best useless for actual, oppressed subjects struggling against background conditions of injustice.

The essays in this volume are notable for the fact that they *do* pay attention to the actual (or, in some cases, theorize the significance of paying attention to the actual). In a weak sense, simply employing a methodology of examining actual rather than counterfactual/hypothetical ideal(ized) worlds qualifies a work as an instance of non-ideal theory. But the essays in this volume, being feminist, qualify as non-ideal theory in a stronger sense as well: they not only examine and theorize actual lives, they focus on the lives of those who live under conditions that are *particularly* distant from the ideal (in the sense of perfect), a distance that is generated and sustained by systemic sources of injustice. While *no one* lives an ideal (in the sense of perfect) life or under ideal (in the sense of perfect) conditions, some people live worse or more difficult lives, and under worse or more difficult conditions, than others. Sometimes this is due to natural luck. Often, it is due to the injustices of domination and oppression.[10] Developing theory that reflects the lives of women and others who face systemic injustice requires theory that is non-ideal(ized) in this stronger sense: it focuses on the actualities of people whose lives, *through injustice*, are kept distant from an ideal.

## 3 Preview of the Essays

Each of the essays in Part I of this volume theorize, from a feminist perspective, about either or both of the two thematics discussed above: the relation between the ethical, the social, and the political; and the contrast between ideal(izing) and non-ideal(izing) methods.



In the first chapter, Bat-Ami Bar On expresses a worry about the loss of the centrality of feminist political action, a loss that has come about in two ways. First, as feminists have shifted their attention from changing public opinion and initiating large-scale changes in the structuring of public life to transforming practices internal to personal relationships or to relationships within more private or bounded communities, feminist activism has become less clearly political. Secondly, even the activism—including revolutionary activism—typical of second wave feminism has been characterized by feminists as activism rooted in moral commitments rather than as political action. This characterization, according to Bar On, misconstrues the relation between the ethical and the political, and wrongly presumes that political action cannot produce its own sort of normativity but rather needs to borrow normative content from the ethical realm. Bar On rejects the realist assumption that politics has no normativity, and the apparent assumption of feminists that feminist activism can bring feminist moral values into the political, but that the values themselves remain moral, while political action is not a source of (feminist) normativity. She argues instead for an Arendtean understanding of political action that she urges feminists to embrace.

In Chapter 2, Lisa Rivera continues probing the relation between ethics on politics, and in doing so she also evaluates ideal and non-ideal theories for their ability to conceive of this relation adequately. Unlike Bar On, Rivera begins with the assumption that feminist commitments *are* political (rather than moral) commitments, and, focusing on the political commitment to resist oppression, she raises the question of whether such a commitment can count as an ethical reason. A worry that the importance of this sort of political commitment gets overlooked leads Rivera to be critical of ideal (moral) theory, in part because it fails to account for the normative priority that agents' political commitments can have. Invoking the insights of a version of moral particularism and emphasizing the particularity of an agent's social location as it relates to her commitment to resist oppression, Rivera points out that while an ideal theory may recognize the moral value that a political commitment can carry by virtue of contributing to others' good, the theory will still be inadequate if it fails to recognize that the political commitment—tied to the agent's particular relation to oppression—is not interchangeable with other reasons for acting, even if the resulting action brings about an equivalent good.

The last two essays of Part I assess frameworks or methods in terms of whether they engage in idealization, and work to pinpoint the sort of idealizing moves that are problematic and to identify the merits of non-ideal theory. In my own chapter, Chapter 3, my focus is on a eudaimonistic ethical framework. This framework appears unconducive for theorizing about the actual conditions faced by oppressed people, since eudaimonism centers the concept of *eudaimonia* or flourishing, and under some conditions of oppression *eudaimonia* may be unattainable. I suggest that while an idealizing form of eudaimonism must posit the background conditions and the features of moral subjectivity under which it is possible for an exercise of the virtues to be constitutive of (an attainable) flourishing—and must idealize in order to do this since actual conditions and actual features of moral subjectivity under oppression interfere in the possibility of virtue functioning in this way—it

is worth distinguishing between an idealizing and a non-idealizing eudaimonism. I thus recommend that a non-idealizing eudaimonism continue to center the concept of flourishing—now understood as largely unattainable—and examine the frustrations and disappointments of exercising the virtues under conditions of oppression where the virtues become disconnected from flourishing.

In Chapter 4 Alison Jaggar compares two methods for theorizing about justice and injustice: that of John Rawls and that of Iris Marion Young. She outlines the ways in which Rawls idealizes, and the contrasting ways in which Young avoids idealization, demonstrating the superiority of Young's critical method for addressing actual injustices. The pitfalls of Rawls' ideal theory include his exclusive focus on developing general principles which can then be applied rather than starting with descriptive accounts of actual practices, his choice to employ a fictional—and in fact impossible to actualize—model of reasoning (the reasoning that takes place in the hypothetical original position), and his focus on a society in which, counter to the facts of actual societies, members comply fully with the governing principles instead of on an actual society with all of its deviations from full compliance. Young avoids all of these pitfalls and Jaggar spells out the advantages of her doing so. What Jaggar reveals is the enormous potential of a feminist, non-idealizing, critical theorization of justice, particularly in the hands of a philosopher as passionate and imaginative as Iris Marion Young.

Part II of this volume is comprised of essays that critique one particular aspect of ideal theory, namely the idealizing portrayals of personhood employed in ideal theory. Each of these four essays focus on a different way in which this idealizing takes place: through the idealizing assumption of a self whose embodiment is as a 'singleton' (as opposed to a conjoined twin), through the idealizations of heteronormativity and heteronormative persons, through the idealization of persons as not needing (good enough) care and as not having been scarred by bad care, and through the idealization of persons as having cognitive capacities that not all actual humans have (alongside a degrading, stereotyped portrayal of actual cognitively impaired people, who are thereby excluded from personhood).

Christine Overall, contributing to feminism's practice of attending to embodiment, argues in Chapter 5 that ideal theory tends to ignore the fact that persons are embodied at all; feminist theorists do much better in that regard and regularly include considerations of gendered and racialized bodies, and bodies that are shaped by age, weight, and abilities and disabilities, and yet even feminists uniformly assume the embodied personhood of a singleton. Overall challenges the reader to rethink even this assumption, in part so as not to take for granted that the singleton way of being separable from other bodies, and the singleton habits of exercising the sort of authority, awareness and privacy that singletons have with respect to their (single) bodies, are the only or the ideal ways of being embodied. Taking for granted the inevitability or the desirability of singleton embodiment leads to poor treatment of conjoined twins, who, as Overall shows, are not necessarily better off being 'normalized,' that is, turned into singletons through surgical separation.

A different sort of normalization—the normalization and idealization of heterosexuality through a pretense of its universality—is the focus of Chapter 6, by Ada Jaarsma. She draws on Søren Kierkegaard as a resource for the critical questioning of this idealization. Her reason for turning to Kierkegaard is that she recognizes that, being ideologically motivated, the tenacity of people's allegiance to heteronormativity cannot be undermined through rational argumentation, or even a more comprehensive education, alone; it requires instead an existential guilt and the development of a spiritual inwardness because this is what can subvert the subjective attachment to this particular practice of the normal and the repression (of the queer) that it requires. Additionally, a Kierkegaardian understanding of the spiritual can be counterposed to the fundamentalist's conception of religion (which Kierkegaard would claim is not spiritual at all), displacing the Religious Right's hold on the religious or spiritual discourse on hetero- and homosexuality.



Another discourse that makes idealizing assumptions about personhood is the discourse of distributive justice. Anca Gheaus, in Chapter 7, critiques theories of distributive justice, and the very ideal of distributive justice, by observing that a crucial element for fostering people's equal chances at success—good enough care—cannot be accounted for by theories that purport to cover all the varieties of goods that must be distributed fairly. Idealizing theories of distributive justice both idealize the persons about whom they theorize (by making oversimplified and false assumptions about their care needs, if they are characterized as needing care at all), and idealize the potential capacity of social policies to ensure whatever care is needed. Real, as opposed to idealized, persons often suffer from their histories of *bad* care, which leave traumas that cannot be easily overcome or repaired through fair distributive practices. Real, as opposed to idealized, social policies and institutions are insufficient—and, as Gheaus contends, *cannot* suffice—to meet actual needs for good enough care or to compensate for the effects of bad care. As important as policies directed at equalizing access to good care are, they will remain inadequate because necessary caring relations cannot be created or distributed through even the best policies. Good caring relations, according to Gheaus, must be promoted by those most able to do so, namely those individuals who have themselves benefitted from good care.

Like Gheaus, Eva Feder Kittay engages the literature on care ethics in her chapter, Chapter 8, arguing directly that care ethics stands as an excellent example of a non-idealized ethics. She contrasts care ethics with those justice-based theories that idealize in such a way as to exclude from personhood people who have severe cognitive disabilities, and points out that these exclusions result from failures of responsible and non-arrogant inquiry—failures that are themselves *unethical*—in the very practice of doing (idealized) ethics. Kittay characterizes the contrast between care ethics and theories of justice by emphasizing their different 'entry points': care ethics takes as a point of entry actual practices of care (and from there, aims to conceive and actualize 'best practices' of care), while in the case of justice the entry point is the hypothetical, fictionalized, or oversimplified theoretical assumptions or stipulations about moral subjects and moral conditions. Kittay's critique of idealized ethics focuses on two utilitarian theories—that of Peter Singer and Jeff McMahan—that distinguish between persons and nonpersons in such a way as to exclude people with severe cognitive disabilities from personhood, an exclusion that results from

their reliance on hypothetical examples that employ only stereotyped portrayals of the cognitively disabled, instead of on accurate, empirical information.

While Part II of the volume primarily critiques idealized characterizations of personhood, the essays of Part III take the next step and re-envision the moral and political subject without engaging in pernicious idealizations. Various traits are considered for this remade subject—who is understood to be living under and struggling against the non-ideal conditions of oppression—as the authors explore the possibilities of the self as vulnerable, as exhibiting a virtuous sort of anger, as appropriately (and imperfectly) forgiving, and as solidaristic.

Desirée Melton theorizes the vulnerable self in Chapter 9. Just as Jaarsma pointed out in the case of heteronormativity that it cannot be undermined with mere rational argument but requires instead an existential guilt and a spiritual approach, so Melton argues that whites' refusal to recognize racial injustice cannot be dislodged with evidence or argumentation; undermining this refusal also requires an existential awareness in the form of a disposition that Melton calls 'vulnerability.' Her claim is that the disposition of vulnerability enables the self to be open to recognizing racial injustice. The disposition—which involves an attunement to the mutual dependence of self and other on each other for understanding and respect—can be purposely cultivated, and Melton recommends such cultivation, a task which, because of how racism and white privilege function, she expects will be easier for blacks than for whites.

For Macalester Bell in Chapter 10, the trait to be investigated is anger, which can count as a virtue only if it is appropriate anger; Bell is interested in the possibilities of anger being a virtue under the very non-ideal conditions of oppression. Anger, a response to being wronged, seems promising from a feminist perspective because it can be an oppositional response to the wrongs of oppression, an assertion of self-respect in the face of a wrong done to one, and a force that serves to motivate resistance. As a character trait understood along the lines suggested by an Aristotelian framework, anger, to qualify as a virtue, must be appropriate in a variety of respects (well timed, well targeted, properly moderated, etc.). Bell further questions whether anger can count as a virtue in non-ideal conditions if its only connection to flourishing is that it will eventually lead to flourishing (for the bearer of the trait or for others). She dubs an account that depends on this future-oriented connection between virtue and flourishing the 'Eventual Flourishing Account' and argues against it, supporting instead an account—the 'Appropriate Attitude Account'—that insists on the non-instrumental value of a trait such as anger.

Anger emerges again as a consideration in Alice MacLachlan's discussion of forgiveness in Chapter 11. MacLachlan illustrates the inadequacy of any singular ideal of what forgiveness is or should be, noting that forgiveness can take place in a wide range of contexts and for a wide range of reasons. Singular ideals or paradigms of forgiveness have tended in the philosophical literature to ignore how contextual meanings—and the very value—of forgiveness can vary depending on gendered dimensions of the situation; the expectation that women will self-sacrifice and refrain from anger about wrongs done to them, for instance, can make the value of their forgiveness suspect. And yet, since forgiveness does retain some value even in non-ideal situations where its value may be compromised or reshaped, MacLachlan proposes that one look at forgiveness as a practice (rather than an ideal), and recognize it as an imperfect practice that can and often should take place even under imperfect conditions. For instance, forgiving may be animated as a practice in which forgiveness is entangled with anger and resentment, and this 'imperfect forgiveness' may be exactly the sort of forgiveness that is best suited for certain situations, such as situations in which women's anger is so constrained that it can only be expressed when intermingled with the forgiveness she is expected to deliver.



Sally Scholz, in Chapter 12, investigates the moral and political subject whose obligations and responsibilities stem from her being in a relation of feminist political solidarity, a solidarity that forms in opposition to injustice. Describing feminist political solidarity as a commitment (to a cause or political struggle) that members of a solidary group undertake together, rather than, for instance, an already-existing unity amongst people who share an identity, Scholz contends that the particularities of the group's political aim will affect the sorts of obligations and responsibilities that arise from their solidarity; that is, the members of the solidary group are transformed through their commitment, as well as, often, through the challenges of carrying out this commitment with a diverse group of others.

A requirement of non-ideal theory is that it contextualize moral and political problems within the actual worlds about which it theorizes. The essays in Part IV of this volume are each strongly rooted in a different, particular, context, in each case a context that exhibits a problem or an injustice. In each of these essays, the author refrains from examples in which the characteristics of the moral/political subjects and of the background conditions are hypothetical, counterfactual, and impossible in the real world—each author refrains from pernicious idealization—and instead analyzes an actual problem within a context whose details the author knows about through accounts of experience, including empirical studies and fictional and nonfictional narrative.

In Chapter 13, Peggy DesAutels begins with the recognition of the importance of studying moral life in contexts where power is unequal and exercised abusively, and she compares two such contexts: contexts of oppression, and contexts in which a particular organizational structure supports unequal and perhaps abusive power relations. She focuses on hierarchical organizations in which a moral wrongdoing has taken place, and considers the possibilities for someone within the organization to resist this wrongdoing by engaging in 'whistleblowing'—exposing the wrongdoing with the aim of bringing it to a halt. Individual whistleblowers, DesAutels claims, are much like (other) resisters of oppression, especially in terms of the sort of moral damage they may sustain, and in terms of the sorts of virtues that they need to exercise in the course of their resistance. Furthermore, gender analysis shows some particular ways in which women whistleblowers are especially vulnerable.

María Pía Lara's analysis in Chapter 14 is contextualized in the problem of rape, including many of its varieties (for instance, rape in war, rape of young girls in forced marriages, rape within abusive relationships); her primary focus is on explaining how to derive meaning and ultimately legal accountability by way of concrete narratives. Beginning with stories—in this case, stories of rape—as

presenting particular examples of a kind of violence and moving from there through the moral disclosures that the stories open up, one can arrive at new conceptualizations of violence. Borrowing from Arendt, Lara emphasizes that it is in the public realm—where 'spectators' of a story can debate its meaning—that the 'moral filter' that allows one to understand the story emerges. Being able to understand the sort of violence that rape is (through the moral lens that Lara proposes, a 'paradigm of evil') and then define rape as a crime (through a 'paradigm of justice' which offers the legal category of accountability) depends upon this process of 'reflective judgment.'

The role of narratives for understanding violence and abuse remains a theme in Chapter 15, by Diana Tietjens Meyers; Meyers explores the relationship between narratives of the victims of human rights abuses and normativity. Meyers rejects two influential narrative theories that connect narrative to normativity but that Meyers views as able to capture neither the conditions of ongoing (rather than isolated) violence under which abuse victims narrate nor the most relevant features of these victims' narratives (including, for instance, the shame-driven silence that suppresses many female victims' stories). She proposes instead that one abandon the idealized expectation of perfect moral closure (where the story's closure is a reflection of moral closure in the real world, a moral closure that would consist—ideally—of a permanent end to all human rights abuses) and pay attention instead to the 'moments of moral closure' that surface in victims' narratives, narratives that are likely to be fragmented representations of sufferings but that cannot reflect any completed real-world moral closure because such closure has not occurred. Representing a 'moral void' through the communication of the violation carries an implied moral demand that takes the place of a traditionally-conceived form of moral closure, and this moral demand that issues from victims' narratives can enter successfully into humans rights discourse if those who listen to the narratives are equipped with the kinds of background knowledge that enables them to competently discern the moral meanings of the narrative.

The last chapter of the book is Ann Ferguson's, which focuses on women's grassroots resistance that is a part of the anti-corporate globalization movements. As the other authors in the fourth section of the book do, Ferguson begins with careful attention to the actual—in this case, to actual cases of women's activism—and bases her theorizations on these concrete cases. Ferguson considers three different ways of framing justice that all can be found within these cases of activism, labeling them the 'libertarian or neo-liberal justice' paradigm, the 'welfare state/social democratic justice' paradigm, and the 'justice as solidarity' paradigm. She finds this last paradigm to be the most fruitful in that it can effect fundamental change in the form that globalization takes, and she spends time detailing the practices—actual, collectivist social relations of production that serve as alternatives to capitalist globalization—that support this vision of global justice as solidarity, noting the important place of women activists with feminist concerns contributing to this vision, and insisting all the while that the vision is achievable rather than utopian.

Together the essays of this volume engage in a wide range of concerns with the ethical, social and political dimensions of the actual, non-ideal world we live



in, focusing a feminist lens on both the oppression and the resistance present or possible in this world. It is my hope that these attempts at critically understanding the actual can support even a bit of movement toward more just arrangements.

**Acknowledgments** Bat-Ami Bar On and I have been having numerous and lengthy discussions about the relationship between ethics and politics. These discussions yielded both her chapter in this volume and my introduction (particularly the first section of it); both the connections and the disagreements between our pieces should be clear. I am very grateful to her for the ways she has challenged and contributed to my thinking about the issue.

## Notes

1. I am using the term 'ethics' and the term 'social and political philosophy' because I am following the customary way of dividing philosophical subfields (in the titles of courses, in the organization of textbooks, in the descriptions of specializations, etc.). However, below, the customary division–where 'ethics' stands alone as one subfield as if it were distinct from the social, and distinct from the political, and where 'social' and 'political' are lumped together as if there were not important differences between them–will be problematized.
2. Thanks to Bat-Ami Bar On for drawing my attention to these elements, especially the element of publicity.
3. See Alison Jaggar's claim that within the 'diversity' of 'Western feminist ethics,' 'a certain consistency of approach may be discerned. This consistency is expressed as a distinctively feminist version of naturalism, rooted in feminists' concern about contingent inequalities of gender' (2000, 457). Of course, there are feminists who reject this naturalist approach; see for instance Virginia Held (2002). A version of feminist naturalism in ethics is developed in great detail by Margaret Urban Walker (1998/2007, 2003).
4. Lorraine Code (2002) makes this point.
5. This observation recalls for me the following incident. One time–maybe twelve or so years ago–my partner Ami and I were camping in a campground. It was morning, and the people in the neighboring campsite had tied their dog up and driven off for the day. Immediately, the dog starting whining and crying, and both Ami and I looked over at the dog sympathetically. 'Poor dog,' I said, 'he misses his people.' 'Poor dog,' Ami said, 'he wants to be free, off his leash.' Our comments–our projections onto this dog–reveal plenty, but among other things they seem to have foretold the fact that in the past decade Ami has drifted more squarely into the position of a political theorist centrally concerned with the question of freedom, and I into the position of an ethicist focused on the concept of flourishing. The political theorist wanted to ensure the dog's freedom, and the ethicist wanted to secure for the dog what he needs to flourish (including in this dog's case, and as emphasized in some versions of feminist ethics, connection or relation to others).
6. This claim has roots in Nagel (1979).
7. Cheshire Calhoun uses the term 'realism' to refer to 'attentiveness to what moral life is really like–to what moral agents are really like, to what the production and acquisition of moral knowledge is really like, to what the social practice of morality is really like, to what character development is really like, to what practical decision making is really like–as *opposed* to the conventions employed within moral philosophy for describing these same things,' and she believes that such a realism (which she further qualifies by calling it an 'inventive realism') 'captures the common character of women philosophers' work in moral philosophy' (Calhoun 2004, 4; italics in the original).
8. Mills draws on the work of Onora O'Neill (1987; 1993) and follows O'Neill in rejecting idealization while endorsing abstraction; he argues that while some abstraction abstracts away from gender, race and class realities, not all abstraction does, and that abstraction as a tool of

theorizing is necessary for the theory to avoid particularism and relativism. This puts him at odds with, for instance, Margaret Urban Walker's non-idealizing, naturalized approach, since she falls on the particularism side of the generalist-particularist debates (though her account of 'moral particularity' differs from other literature on 'moral particularism') and even permits a version of relativism. I will not analyze these differences here. Mills' embrace of O'Neill's defense of abstraction also puts him somewhat at odds with Lisa Schwartzman (2006), who, also responding to O'Neill's work on abstraction and idealization, is convinced that in the context of oppression, abstraction is so likely to be pernicious that it ought to be avoided; she contends that 'theorists who aim to construct highly abstract models succeed in abstracting only from certain features, while other aspects of our social world remain unchallenged and often unacknowledged' (2006, 8), and specifically that 'in the context of oppression ... methods of abstraction often involve the bracketing of information that is crucial to understanding the nature and sources of subjugation' (2006, 78).

9. Schwartzman, too, recognizes the necessity and the value of 'normative ideals,' distinguishing them from 'idealizations' (see Schwartzman 2006, 88–93).
10. I like to keep in mind Iris Marion Young's point that oppression has many different possible 'faces,' including exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (see Young 1990).

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# Part I
# Feminist Theorizations of Ethics and Politics, and of the Ideal and Non-ideal