PART I

Particularity

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Introduction: Iris Murdoch, moral psychology, feminism, communitarianism

These essays represent my continuing effort to help bring moral psychology into more direct contact with contemporary moral theory. By "moral psychology" I mean the philosophical study of the psychic capacities involved in moral agency and moral responsiveness – emotion, perception, imagination, motivation, judgment. Moral philosophers have been too focused on rational principle, on impartiality, on universality and generality, on rules and codes in ethics. The importance of the psychological dimension of the moral life – that is, on moral life and experience themselves – has been masked, implicitly denied, or at least neglected. In such a moral and psychological inquiry, one cannot remain content with a strict separation between the disciplines of philosophy and psychology (and the social sciences more generally). Philosophers and psychologists engaged in studies of morality are concerned about the same phenomena and need to learn from one another.

Iris Murdoch's 1970 collection *The Sovereignty of Good* first steered me in this direction. Murdoch laments philosophy's inability to "encounter" an expanding domain of psychology, and she says, "A working philosophical psychology is needed which can at least attempt to connect modern psychological terminology with a terminology concerned with virtue."[1] Clearly much progress has been made in this direction since these words were written. Virtue theory is close to being a mainstream concern in moral philosophy. (Yet at the same time, much of the virtue literature fails to explore adequately the psychologically rich territory that an understanding of the virtues actually requires.) A few philosophers have begun to mine social and cognitive psychology for its moral-theoretic insights.[2] Psychologists such as Lawrence Kohlberg have seen

I wish to thank David Wong for helpful comments on this chapter.

1. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 46. Numbers in parentheses in the text refer to pages in this volume.
2. Here the exemplary work of Owen Flanagan, Jr., must be mentioned: *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

the necessity of normative philosophy for a responsible approach to a psychological theory of moral development.

I intend these essays to contribute to this emerging tradition of moral psychology. Yet many of Murdoch's criticisms of the then-current practice of moral philosophy still have not, I think, been adequately heeded. She speaks on several occasions of the absence of the concept of *love* in moral theory, of its being "theorized away" (1). She brings out powerfully (in her novels as well as her philosophical essays)[3] the importance of *moral perception* for any full account of how people come to choose the actions they do. We make choices within the world we see, and what (and how) we see is itself an integral part of the quality of our moral consciousness.

Murdoch also laments the exclusive focus on *action* in moral theory (16), with consequent neglect of attitude, perception, emotion (although the last gets insufficient attention in Murdoch's own discussion). In a famous example of a mother and daughter-in-law, Murdoch brings out how our thoughts and attitudes even toward people with whom we come not to have any contact can be appropriate objects of moral assessment. Murdoch says unabashedly that moral philosophy should have something to tell us about how to make ourselves morally better. It should recommend a worthy ideal and have something to say, grounded in a well-informed view of human nature, about how to direct ourselves toward that ideal.

These challenges have been inadequately addressed in the two and half decades since Murdoch voiced them, and it is striking how little moral philosophers have written on Murdoch and her work. Yet I have the impression that many philosophers have read *The Sovereignty of Good* and found it intriguing, and possibly deep. The essays in this volume take up Murdoch's challenges, and I hope they will contribute to bringing her concerns into closer contact with moral theory as presently practiced.

One current tendency within moral theory that has taken up some of Murdoch's work in a deliberate (though still not very systematic) way is feminist ethics. Feminist ethics is a quite diverse and rich territory, but the element I refer to here is feminist interest in a "morality of care," with which the essays in Part III of my volume are concerned. Some feminists have seen in Murdoch's attempted resuscitation of a notion of love in ethics, and in her notion of "attention" (drawn originally from Simone Weil), elements of a consciousness with which many women approach

3. Unfortunately, Murdoch's *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (New York: Allen Lane, 1992) appeared just as I was completing this collection and I was not able to make use of it in my remarks.

the moral life; and they have seen this moral consciousness as distinct from, and unexpressible within, familiar deontological and consequentialist moral theories.[4]

Feminist currents in ethical theory have undoubtedly been a prime factor in keeping alive concerns with the emotional and perceptual – and more generally, the psychological – dimension of moral life. Here the psychologist Carol Gilligan has had a noteworthy and salutary effect on moral philosophy. Feminism has sparked and has continued to press some of the dissatisfaction with traditional approaches that I have attempted to address in these essays. Whether or not one thinks that caring, empathy, compassion, emotional understanding, responsiveness to need, and the like have some link to femaleness (and feminists themselves are divided on this question), it is indisputable that an interest in feminism has helped sustain attention to these qualities of character and their place in an adequate conception of the moral life.

The essays in Part I concern *particularity,* a term meant to encapsulate some important lacunae in traditional Kantian and utilitarian, deontological and consequentialist, theories. Chapter 2, "Iris Murdoch and the Domain of the Moral," argues that a Murdochian attentive love or concern for a particular other person is a moral accomplishment not captured in "impartialist" moral theories – those emphasizing principles generated from a purely impartial point of view. Nor is it captured in the idea of the "personal point of view" (the point of view of our individual projects and commitments), a currently influential notion for expressing dissatisfaction with, or the limitations of, traditional impartialism.

Chapter 3, "Moral Perception and Particularity," explores the roles of moral judgment and perception of particulars in the moral life, especially in bridging general principle and particular situation. I argue that both perception and moral judgment are complexes of semidistinct moral capacities, rather than single unitary ones. Again, I argue that these mor-

4. Sara Ruddick's widely reprinted "Maternal Thinking," *Feminist Studies* 6, 1980: 342–67, has perhaps the best-known feminist use of Murdoch's notion of loving attention. Other sustained and interesting feminist uses of Murdoch in ethics are in Meredith Michaels, "Morality Without Distinction," *Philosophical Forum* 17, 1986: 175–87; Margaret Urban Walker, "Moral Understandings: Alternative 'Epistemology' for a Feminist Ethics," in E. B. Cole and S. Coultrap-McQuin (eds.), *Explorations in Feminist Ethics: Theory and Practice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) (originally published in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy,* 4, 1989: 15–28); and Sheila Mullett, "Shifting Perspective: A New Approach to Ethics," in L. Code, S. Mullett, and C. Overall (eds.), *Feminist Perspectives: Philosophical Essays on Method and Morals* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

ally central phenomena concerning particularity are not accounted for in principle-based or impartialist theories.

Part II takes up Murdoch's challenge to explore moral excellence. Chapter 4, "Moral Exemplars: Reflections on Schindler, the Trocmés, and Others," uses various case studies of moral exemplars to argue that there are irreducibly different kinds of moral excellence, with distinct underlying psychologies. Chapter 5, "Vocation, Friendship, and Community: Limitations of the Personal-Impersonal Framework," extends the argument of Chapter 2. I argue that there are several morally significant kinds of action and motivation that fit neither the "personal point of view" nor the "pure impersonality" models prominent in recent moral theory. In particular, some familiar modes of moral excellence fail to get a hearing if portrayed (as Susan Wolf portrays them in her seminal essay "Moral Saints") as devotion to some impartially defined "good of everyone" or to a Kantian moral law.

Chapter 6, "Altruism and the Moral Value of Rescue: Resisting Persecution, Racism, and Genocide," explores how best to understand the morally exemplary actions of rescue of Jews by non-Jews during the Holocaust. I argue that the framework of "altruism," or even "extremely risky altruism," fails to capture fully the moral accomplishment involved. The nonaltruism-based values of resistance to racism, to persecution, and to genocide must also be included in order to accommodate our considered assessment of these heroic rescue actions.

Chapter 7, "Virtue and Community," explores Alasdair MacIntyre's claim that virtue and community are closely linked. I distinguish several plausible forms of this claim and argue that MacIntyre is in an important sense right. I further argue that standard ways of conceptualizing morally good actions as "supererogatory" or "going beyond the bounds of duty" falsify the consciousness of the exceptionally virtuous agent and mask the crucial role that community can play in supporting virtue.

Three of the chapters in Part II – 4, 6, and 7 – draw on accounts of rescue during the Holocaust. Philosophers have recently begun to turn their attention to the Holocaust as an event demanding philosophical reflection. I agree with Alan Rosenberg and Gerald Myers's[5] admonition that responding philosophically to the Holocaust is fraught with peril – that one's writing may be unequal to the task and may thereby insult or offend the memory of Holocaust victims. At the same time (Rosenberg and Myers say), *failing* to address the Holocaust has its own peril – that an event of such momentous moral significance *not* come to have a secure place in the

5. Preface to *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), esp. p. ix.

standard reference points of philosophical contributions to ethics. Iris Murdoch (herself fascinated with the Holocaust) rightly said that moral learning requires common objects of attention. The Holocaust needs to be such an object for moral philosophers.

In these essays, however, I have admittedly avoided facing up to the two most morally salient features of the Holocaust – the appalling evil of its perpetrators and the deafening indifference of millions of ordinary people who were neither perpetrators nor victims. Instead, I have focused on the glittering specimens of human goodness in the face of that evil and indifference. Two of the essays (Chapters 4 and 7) draw substantially on the remarkable example of the French village of Le Chambon, which sheltered refugees in numbers equal to its own population. Chapter 6 follows from Samuel and Pearl Oliner's comprehensive international study of rescuers of Jews.[6] No doubt, my own Jewishness is partly responsible for my fascination with these particular instances of moral goodness, but I think any serious study of moral excellence has much to learn from an encounter with the exemplary individuals discussed in these essays.

Part III contains various explorations of the "morality of care" – as was mentioned, an important strand in feminist ethics and, more generally, a central focal point in current dissatisfactions with traditional Kantian and utilitarian moral theories. Chapter 8, "Compassion" (the earliest piece in this collection), is an account of that virtue. In exploring that one virtue, I aim to suggest the complex and variegated terrain of those virtues connected with "caring," against a tradition (sometimes found in writings sympathetic to the morality of care, including some of my own) that flattens them out by portraying them all as simply species of "sympathy" or "benevolence."

Chapter 9, "Moral Development and Conceptions of Morality," is concerned with the moral development of children and aims to vindicate developmental precursors of the care virtues. I argue that underlying influential theories of moral development are assumptions about morality that "theorize away" responsiveness to the plight of others on the part of very young children. This essay contains a sustained criticism of the claims of principle-based and impartialist ethical theories to encompass the entire field of morality.

Chapter 10, "Gilligan and Kohlberg: Implications for Moral Theory," is a defense of Carol Gilligan's "morality of care" against Lawrence Kohlberg's criticisms. It contains further criticisms of principle-based and impartialist theories, complementing those of Chapter 9.

6. *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York: The Free Press, 1988).

Chapter 11, "Gilligan's 'Two Voices' and the Moral Status of Group Identity," criticizes Gilligan for her tendency to portray moral consciousness in an overdichotomized fashion – care versus justice, responsibility versus rights. In particular, I argue that there can be a moral legitimacy to some of our group identities (professional, race, gender) that cannot be captured in either the language of care or that of justice.

As noted, several of these essays (especially Chapters 6, 9, 10, and 11) engage directly with, and take their cue from, theories and findings of the social sciences. They either presuppose or aim to show that philosophers should find illuminating the explorations of morality in which social scientists – such as the Oliners, Richard Schweder, Jerome Kagan, and (especially) Carol Gilligan and Lawrence Kohlberg – have been engaged. At the same time, I am hoping that social scientists will see that the criticisms and questions emerging from a moral philosopher's approach to their endeavors provide a fruitful and even essential perspective.

One other theme is prominent in several of the essays (especially Chapters 5, 7, and 11) yet not reflected in the organization of this collection – *communitarianism.* In these essays, I have in various ways aspired to link moral psychology with communitarianism. As argued in Chapter 5, the various strands of communitarianism would be strengthened were they to be more fully informed by a moral psychology.

"Communitarianism" is not really a single, unified doctrine but encompasses a family of tendencies within both moral and political philosophy. The opposition of all these tendencies to a familiar individualistic conception of the person and to a purely libertarian conception of society has masked the variety of concerns and doctrines under the rubric of "communitarianism."[7] I want to situate my several discussions of moral psychology and communitarianism in these three essays within a more general framework. Although there are various ways of dividing up this territory, one can distinguish, for my purposes here, three strands within contemporary communitarianism – *identity communitarianism, virtue communitarianism,* and *social (or political) communitarianism.*

Identity communitarianism explores the moral significance of the

7. A tendency to see communitarianism essentially as a unitary doctrine (deploying various arguments) can be found in many (usually anticommunitarian) writings, even good ones such as Will Kymlicka's *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), Chapter 6, "Communitarianism." Failure to note the differences between distinct strands within communitarianism, however, mars not only anticommunitarian but also communitarian writings. (Charles Taylor's essay mentioned in footnote 10 is an important exception to this.)

particular group identities that make us who we are.[8] Identity communitarians claim that certain strands of liberalism contain a faulty notion of the person because they give insufficient place to these particularistic group identities. *Virtue communitarianism,* identified most prominently with Alasdair MacIntyre's work (especially *After Virtue*), claims that moral and other virtues must be understood primarily in the context of communities. Communities nourish, support, and partly define virtue. Virtue communitarianism is located primarily in moral rather than political theory. As mentioned earlier, virtue theory aims to correct an overemphasis in moral theory on rational, universal principles and impartiality; virtue communitarianism can be seen as a tendency within virtue theory to emphasize the communal rather than the purely individual character of virtue. (This issue is discussed further in Chapter 7.)

Social communitarianism advocates that a society or polity promote, embody, or encourage certain goods to be shared across that polity; these goods – solidarity, family stability, mutual commitment, civic participation, and the like – are seen specifically as "communitarian" goods. Social communitarianism has generally been viewed not as a moral view but as a political or social one. It is true that social communitarianism, like virtue communitarianism, is concerned with the promotion of moral goods, often understood as virtues; but the class of moral goods with which virtue communitarianism is concerned is much more extensive than that in social communitarianism and is not limited to social goods and virtues. Virtue communitarianism is concerned with the whole of virtue that could plausibly be seen as affected by the communities of which a person is a part (integrity, courage, compassion, as well as civic responsibility, solidarity, civic loyalty), whereas social communitarianism is concerned only with the latter three – virtues or goods that are distinctly communitarian in character.

Identity communitarianism differs from the other two in not specifically advocating the promotion of particular positive values or goods at all. Unlike social communitarianism it does *not* necessarily advocate the promotion of shared goods or virtues for a whole society. Rather, identity communitarianism concerns the moral meanings given by individuals to their various particular group identities. Those moral meanings can be negative or can require the individual to struggle to give a meaning to the identity different from the usual one. A white South African, for example, might fall into either of these categories. She might see her identity as shameful and unfortunate, or she might try to construct an antiracist,

8. Michael Sandel refers to these identity constituents as "encumbrances." Identity communitarianism also refers to the "embedded," "situated," or "implicated" self.

antiapartheid form of white South African identity, defined specifically against the reigning understanding of that identity.

Thus understood, identity communitarianism is essentially a moral rather than a political doctrine.[9] An identity communitarian (in contrast to the social communitarian) might think that the state or polity should be *neutral* with regard to the possible moral meanings of group identities, seeing these as appropriately functioning in domains outside state action and control. It is, however, entirely consistent to subscribe to both identity and social communitarianism.

Similarly, an identity communitarian need not believe in the links between community and virtue averred by the virtue communitarian. Although both identity and virtue communitarians are concerned with morality, they are so in somewhat different ways. The group identities – such as gender, institutional, professional, national, ethnic, and racial identities – with which the identity communitarian is concerned may or may not be "communities" in the sense in which a virtue communitarian like MacIntyre conceives of community as required for virtue. The latter types of communities are generally geographically located, encompass a substantial portion of their members' day-to-day lives, and are rooted in specific traditions. The difference between the two forms of community on this score lies partly in the fact that the identity communitarian need not claim, as the virtue communitarian does, that group identities *necessarily* give rise to specific virtues. As I argue in Chapter 11, there is much room for individual interpretation in determining how group identities provide moral meanings.

Identity communitarianism as a moral doctrine has been little pursued in moral philosophy. In Chapters 5 and 11, I attempt to explore how particular group identities can give moral meanings. What is the moral psychology involved, and how can we conceptualize it in a way that allows us to express the values embodied in these group identities?

In particular, Chapter 5 explores how our professional identities can be sources of moral meaning, moral action, and virtue and begins to delineate a philosophical framework more adequate than the influential "personal/impersonal" one for expressing the moral psychology of the "professionally excellent" person. Chapter 11 explores group identities more generally, extending the moral psychology of Chapter 5; but in particular, it

9. I thus want to distinguish my notion of identity communitarianism from a notion of "identity politics" claiming that certain specific identities (often racial, gender, sexual-preference, ethnic) should be an individual citizen's primary identification for political purposes within the polity. Although certain forms of identity communitarianism will have political implications (depending in part on which encumbrances are in question), I want to leave open for further exploration what these might be.

concerns *gender* as a morally significant group identity. I argue that for women their gender – their identification *as women* – can be an important source of positively valued and valuable moral orientation.

Despite these differences, there is one natural connection between identity communitarianism and virtue communitarianism. This connection holds when a key morally significant group identity (for a particular individual) corresponds to her identity as a member of a virtue-sustaining community. In that case the group identity can be integral to what allows that community to sustain that person's virtue.[10] This connection is precisely the concern of Chapter 7, "Virtue and Community," which argues, in a MacIntyrean spirit, that the Le Chambon villagers' identification as members of that community was decisive in their exemplifying exceptional virtue during the Nazi occupation. The essay attempts to work out the moral psychology of the villagers that made possible the link between community and virtue.

I have not been concerned in these essays with social communitarianism. As a largely political rather than moral doctrine, this form of communitarianism might seem to require less in the way of a moral psychology than do the other two. But although this is not the place to do so, I would nevertheless argue that social communitarianism too requires a moral psychology. Such a psychology would help the social communitarian avoid the familiar liberal criticism that any vision of the common good for a polity could be achieved only through coercion. An adequate moral psychology would help point the way to a middle ground between pure state neutrality and coercion – a middle ground of "structured encouragement and promotion" of certain communitarian goods and virtues. But this argument will have to be made on another occasion.

10. My discussion here draws on Charles Taylor's essay "Cross-Purposes: The Liberalism-Communitarianism Debate," in Nancy Rosenblum (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).