

Cambridge University Press  
0521436192 - Moral Perception and Particularity  
Lawrence A. Blum  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

Most contemporary moral philosophy is concerned with issues of rationality, universality, impartiality, and principle. By contrast, Lawrence Blum is concerned with the psychology of moral agency. The essays in this collection examine the moral import of emotion, motivation, judgment, perception, and group identifications, and explore how all these psychic capacities contribute to a morally good life.

Blum takes up the challenge of Iris Murdoch to articulate a vision of moral excellence that provides a worthy aspiration for human beings. Drawing on accounts of non-Jewish rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, Blum argues that impartial principle can mislead us about the variety of forms of moral excellence.

A specific feature of the book is its engagement with feminism. Blum defends the “care ethics” espoused by feminists, although he also criticizes it for overstating its case and for oversimplifying its complex relationships with justice and group identities.

Cambridge University Press  
0521436192 - Moral Perception and Particularity  
Lawrence A. Blum  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## Moral perception and particularity

Cambridge University Press  
0521436192 - Moral Perception and Particularity  
Lawrence A. Blum  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

# Moral perception and particularity

LAWRENCE A. BLUM

*University of Massachusetts, Boston*



Cambridge University Press  
 0521436192 - Moral Perception and Particularity  
 Lawrence A. Blum  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
 10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1994

First published 1994

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Blum, Lawrence A.  
 Moral perception and particularity / Lawrence A. Blum.  
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-521-43028-3. — ISBN 0-521-43619-2 (pbk.)

1. Ethics. 2. Ethics — Psychological aspects. I. Title.  
 BJ1031.B65 1994

170 — dc20

93-25284

CIP

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-521-43028-3 hardback

ISBN 0-521-43619-2 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2000

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page vii</i>
PART I: PARTICULARITY	
1 Introduction: Iris Murdoch, moral psychology, feminism, communitarianism	3
2 Iris Murdoch and the domain of the moral	12
3 Moral perception and particularity	30
PART II: MORAL EXCELLENCE	
4 Moral exemplars: reflections on Schindler, the Trocmés, and others	65
5 Vocation, friendship, and community: limitations of the personal-impersonal framework	98
6 Altruism and the moral value of rescue: resisting persecution, racism, and genocide	124
7 Virtue and community	144
PART III: THE MORALITY OF CARE	
8 Compassion	173
9 Moral development and conceptions of morality	183
10 Gilligan and Kohlberg: implications for moral theory	215
11 Gilligan's "two voices" and the moral status of group identity	237
<i>Index</i>	269

## Acknowledgments

My greatest personal and intellectual debt in the writing of this series of essays is to my “moral psychology” group – David Wong, Owen Flanagan, Margaret Rhodes, Amelie Rorty, Jennifer Radden, Ruth Anna Putnam (and “when-in-town” members Vicky Spelman and Jorge Garcia, and former member Andreas Teuber) – which has met biweekly since 1984. Our discussions have helped to develop, and to show the importance of, a psychologically informed approach to moral theory. Without this unequaled setting for intellectual exploration, these essays would not exist.

For intellectual companionship and friendship over the years – and for assistance of many kinds – I am especially indebted to David Wong. Our friendship has been an incomparable source of philosophical conversation and personal support since I began the work in this volume. Marcia Homiak and Victor Seidler have been good friends and intellectual comrades since the beginning of my philosophical career and have deeply shaped the way I approach the subject of ethics. I am grateful also to Owen Flanagan and Michael Slote for suggesting that I collect my essays on moral theory, and to Owen for personal and intellectual support at crucial times.

I want to acknowledge some other important intellectual debts as well. Philip Hallie’s book *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* prompted lines of reflection on moral goodness during the Holocaust that issued in three of these papers. His book, Pierre Sauvage’s film on the same subject *Weapons of the Spirit*, and Samuel and Pearl Oliner’s book *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* have all been inspirations for me regarding the possibilities of human goodness. They have helped me see that moral philosophy needs to take more serious account of moral excellence and how it should do so. Susan Wolf’s marvelous and seminal article “Moral Saints” and Thomas Nagel’s book *The View from Nowhere* provided the provocation for several of the essays here, and I continue to struggle to define my own views in relation to theirs.

My greatest intellectual debt is to Iris Murdoch, whose views are discussed in several of the essays and whose strikingly original essays in *The Sovereignty of Good* first pointed me toward taking seriously moral perception, moral excellence, and moral psychology more generally. Owen

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Flanagan's, Amelie Rorty's, and Martha Nussbaum's writings have helped show me how to carry out the project of moral psychology in the context of contemporary moral theory. Bernard Williams was a pioneer in espousing a more psychologically informed, nonimpartialist moral view, and his writings have been a constant source of inspiration and stimulation.

As mentioned in the first essay, my own work in the area of what has come to be called "care ethics" is grounded and sustained by the many feminist ethicists working this territory. I am especially indebted to Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings both for their path-breaking work in this area and for intellectual exchange and support.

I wish to thank my wonderful colleagues and students at the University of Massachusetts at Boston for providing a nurturing and intellectually stimulating environment over the decade in which I worked on these essays. I hope that my students' reluctance to accept abstract moral theory before having been apprised of the connections with their own lives has helped keep my work somewhat better grounded in moral experience than it might otherwise have been. In any case, I am grateful to my students for all I've learned from them.

The final stages of preparing this manuscript were carried out under an Ethics and the Professions Fellowship at Harvard University; I am very grateful to the Ethics Program for this timely support. I especially wish to thank Jean McVeigh, Helen Hawkins, and Brenda Wicks for their immense assistance regarding my uncertain forays into a new word-processing system, and for help of many other kinds as well. I received support from the National Endowment for the Humanities for a year's leave during which several of these essays were written. Work on the book was also supported with a Faculty Research Fellowship from the University of Massachusetts, Boston. I am grateful for this institutional support.

I want to thank Virginia Suddath, a former student, for some vital last-minute editing.

Personal examples form the core of several of these essays, and I have learned much about the need for, and the way toward, moral perception from my children – Laura, Sarah, and Ben. My life partner, Judy Smith, is an exemplar too of many personal and moral virtues. On a deeper level, she remains an inspiration for the sense of moral excellence and caring I have tried to elucidate in these essays.

## SOURCES

Two of the essays in this volume (Chapters 1 and 11) are being published for the first time. Nine are reprinted, with various degrees of revision,

Cambridge University Press  
 0521436192 - Moral Perception and Particularity  
 Lawrence A. Blum  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

from prior publications. I gratefully acknowledge the following for permission to reprint my essays:

Chapter 2, "Iris Murdoch and the Domain of the Moral," originally appeared in *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (1986), pp. 343–68, and is reprinted here in revised form by permission of D. Reidel Publishing Co.

Chapter 3, "Moral Perception and Particularity," originally appeared in *Ethics*, Vol. 101, No. 4 (1991): 701–25, and is reprinted here with minor revisions (and with a postscript) by permission of University of Chicago Press.

Chapter 4, "Moral Exemplars: Reflections on Schindler, the Trocmés, and Others," appeared in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Volume 12: *Ethical Theory*, edited by French, Uehling, and Wettstein. © 1988 by the University of Notre Dame Press. Reprinted by permission.

Chapter 5, "Vocation, Friendship, and Community: Limitations of the Personal-Impersonal Framework," appeared in O. Flanagan, Jr., and A. Rorty (eds.), *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology* (1990), and is reprinted with minor revisions by permission of MIT Press.

Chapter 6, "Altruism and the Moral Value of Rescue: Resisting Persecution, Racism, and Genocide," appeared in L. Baron, L. Blum, D. Krebs, P. Oliner, S. Oliner, and M. Z. Smolenska (eds.), *Embracing the Other: Philosophical, Psychological, and Historical Perspectives on Altruism* (1992), and is reprinted in revised and expanded form by permission of New York University Press.

Chapter 7, "Virtue and Community," is to appear in Roger Crisp (ed.), *How Should One Live: Essays on the Virtues* (1994), and is printed here in an expanded and revised version by permission of Clarendon Press.

Chapter 8, "Compassion," appeared in Amelie Rorty (ed.), *Explaining Emotions* (© 1980), and is reprinted with minor revisions by permission of the University of California Press.

Chapter 9, "Moral Development and Conceptions of Morality," appeared (under the title "Particularity and Responsiveness") in Jerome Kagan and Sharon Lamb (eds.), *The Emergence of Morality in Young Children*, and is reprinted in substantially revised form by permission of the University of Chicago Press. © 1987 The University of Chicago. All rights reserved.

Chapter 10, "Gilligan and Kohlberg: Implications for Moral Theory," appeared in *Ethics*, Vol. 98 (1988): 472–91, and is reprinted with minor revisions by permission of the University of Chicago Press.