

1 Introduction

If there is a groundbreaking yet still burgeoning area of feminist philosophy, it is that of feminist ethics. Since about the 1980s, feminist philosophers have made significant contributions to all areas of ethics, including normative ethics, moral psychology, metaethics, and applied ethics. They have critiqued traditional moral theories, modified some of them to address feminist concerns, and borrowed concepts from them to serve feminist aims. They have examined the influence of women's oppression on people's psychology, moral character, and actions. To a lesser extent, they have challenged traditional issues in metaethics from the perspective of feminism. Finally, they have addressed topics in applied ethics, such as abortion, adoption, beauty standards, divorce, male socialization, marriage, pornography, pregnancy, post-menopausal pregnancy, prostitution, rape, sex, sexist language, surrogacy, rape, and woman-battering. Such issues either heretofore had not been addressed by philosophers or were addressed but not from a feminist perspective. Yet these issues affect women primarily and detrimentally and call out for philosophical analysis not only in their own right but to highlight their role in maintaining women's oppression. Moreover, feminists complain that women's experiences have largely been left out of philosophy, likely due to the paucity of women in the field. They often import personal experience to their philosophical analysis which not only makes the issues come alive but aids the reader in taking the perspective of the oppressed. Due to space limitations, I will use examples where appropriate to illustrate feminist insights relevant to normative ethics, moral psychology, or metaethics.

It bears mentioning at the outset that the feminist contribution to ethics is not to be equated with a "woman's way" of doing ethics, or a female way of reasoning, or gender essentialism – the view that "all women, in virtue of being women, share a common gendered subjectivity" – as some early work on the ethic of care, a theory initially put forward as a feminist theory, may have suggested (Calhoun, 2004: 8). Feminists largely dismiss the genderization of traits since they believe that it stigmatizes women and perpetuates their oppression. They have come to distinguish *feminine* ethics, which might endorse these tenets, from *feminist* ethics, which is ethics that has as its aim ending women's oppression. One goal of this book is to focus on feminist critiques of traditional ethics and the contributions that feminists have made to ethics with an eye toward ending women's oppression.

A survey of the literature in feminist ethics reveals that through their criticisms of traditional ethics and proposals for change, feminists are advancing a view of moral and rational agency that is at once grounded in and reflective of

women's oppression and yet untainted by it. While criticizing and proposing modifications to ethics, feminists are developing an account of ideal moral and rational agency that is even more nuanced than that found in traditional ethics. Some of the features of agency that have been highlighted in the literature include the following: the ideal agent understands the complexities of morality, is able to know what morality demands in a variety of circumstances, appreciates another person's perspective, is autonomous, especially in terms of her desires, bears responsibility for her actions, and sees that she and others have reasons for acting morally that are related to their own interests that the agent cares about and asserts and protects. The unique insight that feminists have contributed to these features of this feminist ideal agency, aside from their connection to women's oppression, is the role that emotion plays in their development. Largely, it has been the case that throughout the history of philosophy, including ethics, emotions have been downplayed in favor of reason, which feminists have argued is due to the historical association of emotion with women and reason with men. Given the addition of emotion, the account of agency emerging from feminist ethics is much richer than that found in traditional ethics. I will call it "robust agency" rather than "ideal agency," since ideal theory has been criticized by feminists as representing only the experiences of the dominant group due to its failure to attend to social context (Mills, 2005: 168). Robust agency might be able to give us better responses than those given in traditional ethics to problems in ethics, including how we know what our duties are, what kind of person we should strive to become, and why we should act morally. The second goal of this book is to elucidate some of the details of what I take to be an emerging account of moral and rational agency.

2 Normative Ethics

Normative ethics is concerned with the issues of how we should act, morally speaking, and what kind of persons we should become. Feminist ethics takes up these concerns with the goal of ending women's oppression. Feminists have criticized traditional moral theory for the ways it has or might contribute to women's oppression. In response, they have offered modifications of these theories, proposed a new theory, the ethic of care, and borrowed concepts from traditional moral theory to employ for feminist aims.

2.1 Feminist Critiques of Traditional Moral Theories

Philosophers need not be feminists to notice some of the jarring beliefs about women held by key figures in the history of philosophy. Since the field had been predominantly – indeed, almost exclusively – male until the end of the twentieth

century, these views were likely not discussed much or dismissed because the sexism of these philosophers was attributed to their being products of their time. When more women entered the field of philosophy, it became harder to put aside these views. As you can imagine, many women who read the relevant passages for the first time felt excluded by their philosophical heroes. There was discussion about whether to ignore the sexist passages and whether ignoring them was even possible if they formed part of the bedrock of a philosopher's theory. Feminist philosophers who specialized in the history of philosophy revealed the passages, sometimes found in more obscure works, and challenged them head-on. They criticized many historical philosophers for their explicit or implicit sexist views, showing how the views either excluded women from their theories or assigned them to subordinate roles. One of their main objections is that some philosophers have ignored or downplayed the role of emotions and played up the role of reason because of the historical association of emotions with women and reason with men. Let us illustrate some of the feminist criticisms by focusing on the moral theories of Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and Thomas Hobbes.

The root of the division between men and women, and reason and emotion, can be traced at least to Aristotle, who wrote his main works in ethics around 350 BC. Aristotle is known for his virtue theory, according to which a person should follow the dictates of reason and aim for the mean, a virtue, that lies between two extremes, the vices of excess and deficiency. Although not all virtues and vices are depicted neatly this way, courage is a clear example that lies between the vices of foolhardiness and cowardice. For Aristotle, a person uses their deliberative faculties to choose virtue over vice. There is nothing at odds with feminism on this simplistic picture of Aristotle's virtue theory, but Aristotle also believes that women should be excluded from virtue because they are not perfect deliberators, a belief grounded in his archaic biological view that women do not generate as much heat as men do, which makes men intellectually superior. Aristotle believes that heat "concocts" matter, and that male semen generates more heat than female semen, or, menses. Women turn out to be "mutilated" males who are physically and intellectually weaker than men (Tuana, 1992: 23–26). However, Aristotle is not an essentialist because he denies that all men are superior to all women. Men and women natural slaves lack a deliberative faculty, which makes free women superior to male and female slaves. Nevertheless, Aristotle believes that women's inferior deliberative capacity requires that they be ruled by a man – free women should be ruled by a husband, slave women by a master. The ruling man can direct them away from passion, which they naturally tend to, and toward virtuous action. On their own, women are incapable of choosing virtue. Their deficiency relegates them

to stereotypically sexist roles: they must be obedient to a virtuous man either as his wife or as his slave and must bear and nurture his children. The gendered dichotomy between reason and emotion, together with Aristotle's views about biology, render his theory inherently sexist and incapable of being modified to accommodate feminist concerns.

Feminists have criticized Kant's moral theory also because it downplays the significance of emotion while associating it with women, with the effect that women are excluded from full participation in moral theory since at least some of them follow inclination rather than reason. For Kant, the ideal moral act is one that has moral worth, which is to say that it is done both in accordance with duty and for the sake of duty, which is the moral motive. The moral motive is a rational motive because it has duty built into it, and reason gives us our duties. Kant contrasts the moral motive with inclination, such as selfishness. Whether inclination aligns with duty is a matter of luck, but the moral motive will never lead us astray from morality. Although many philosophers understand Kant to say that an act must be completely divorced from inclination for it to have moral worth, this view has been contested on the grounds that inclination can be present so long as the moral motive serves as the act's motivation (Herman, 1981: 359–66). The point to note is that Kant favors reason and a rational motive over inclination or emotion.

One problem with Kant's view for feminism is his belief that women, at least "civilized" or European bourgeoisie women, are not guided by a sense of duty but by their belief that acting wickedly is ugly (Tuana, 1992: 62). This is because Kant believes that their understanding is "beautiful," giving them a strong inborn feeling for all that is beautiful, elegant, and decorated, and sympathy, good-heartedness, and compassion (Tuana, 1992: 62). Men have a "noble" understanding, which allows them to engage in deep meditation and a long-sustained reflection (Tuana, 1992: 62). Non-European women (and men) are not sufficiently developed to possess even a beautiful understanding (Tuana, 1992: 62–63). Kant is not saying that all women are driven by emotion, but that no woman can achieve a noble understanding. Women in general, it seems, cannot act in morally worthy ways since they lack the moral motive, European women because they are believed to be stereotypically emotional rather than rational, and non-European women because they are not sufficiently developed. This view, however, is at odds with one of the fundamental tenets of Kant's moral theory, which is that morality should be "derived from the universal concept of a rational being in general," because moral laws should be binding on all rational beings, and this includes all humans as distinct from nonhuman animals because humans have the capacity for rationality (Tuana, 1992: 59). Kant contradicts himself here, unless he excludes women as rational (Tuana,

1992: 63). But he includes all humans, along with God and the angels, as beings who are capable of rationality, and clearly specifies that men and women are rational beings (Tuana, 1992: 65).

Like Aristotle, Kant assigns women to the gendered roles of wives and mothers (Tuana, 1992: 65). Were they educated in the development of their rational capacities, this would “weaken their charms” which are used on men, and this would inhibit men’s development and improvement and refinement of society (Tuana, 1992: 65). Thus, even if some women can develop their rational capacities, they ought not to. Kant’s view reveals another inconsistency in his theory. He urges that women be treated merely as a means to the ends of men and society, but he famously states in the Formula of Humanity that you ought to “act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means” (Kant, 1981: 36). In the end, for Kant, women are not able to achieve the same moral status as men not because of their inherent inferiority, but because of his beliefs about the roles they should occupy. Were he to stick to his views about universal rationality and the Formula of Humanity, and drop his association of women with emotion, his theory would be more amenable to feminists. As we shall see, feminists employ various aspects of his theory to serve their aims.

Feminists have also criticized historical philosophers for making implicit sexist assumptions such that when their moral theory is played out, it is likely to maintain women’s oppression. Hobbes has been a prime target. Hobbes, like Aristotle, emphasizes reason over emotion. He defines reason in terms of maximizing the satisfaction of one’s own interests or desires: rationally required actions are those that best promote one’s good or self-interest as defined by oneself and measured in terms of the satisfaction of one’s desires or interests. Hobbes believes that persons have only instrumental value, which is to say that their value lies with the expectation that they will benefit others in interactions: “The value, or worth of a man, is as of all other things, his price” (Hobbes, 1962: 73). Hobbes’s concern was to demonstrate the rationality of acting morally for persons concerned with promoting their own self-interest and for whom it is rational to do so. Starting from the State of Nature, the state without morality and laws, where each person is rational to act self-interestedly, he argues that each person can expect to gain more in the way of peace, security, and the goods of cooperation by agreeing to morality and laws than he can expect to gain in the State of Nature where each is acting in his immediate self-interest (Hobbes, 1962: 105). Rationality requires that each person sacrifice just enough to reap the expected benefits of cooperation, yet still be able to maximize the satisfaction of his interests.

The feminist complaints against Hobbes are directed at least partly at the model of the Hobbesian agent. For starters, the agent is assumed to be primarily

rational, which in effect perpetuates both the association of (white, upper class) men with reason, and women with emotion, and the subsequent sexual division of labor in which (these same) men dominate the intellectual, public sphere, while women are relegated to the private sphere (Jaggar, 1983: 46–47). At best, the appeal to the motive of self-interest construes emotion in a masculine way, as the motive appropriate for prompting actions with strangers in the public sphere with which only men are typically associated (Calhoun, 1988). Moreover, the Hobbesian agent is egoistic, which does not speak to women's experiences that are more about altruism than egoism due to their expectations about caretaking (Jaggar, 1983: 42). The Hobbesian agent knows their own desires, but this fails to acknowledge that sexist socialization can deform women's desires, which, in turn, can perpetuate women's oppression when satisfied. The Hobbesian agent is also abstracted away from his particularities, has needs and interests separate from or in opposition to those of others, and is essentially solitary and overly individualistic (Jaggar, 1983: 41). Not only is this depiction at odds with our human needs and physical dependence on others at least at some point in our lives, it favors the mind over the body. It is at base the Cartesian view of the self as disembodied, asocial, unified, rational, and like all other selves, the epitome of the separation of mind and body, and reason and emotion (Jaggar, 2001: 535). Descartes famously requires that a person separate himself from anything bodily including the senses and emotions in the pursuit of knowledge that can be gained only from reason (Descartes, 1979: 13, 19). Feminists believe that the separation and denigration of the body is largely due to the historical association of women with the body and men with the mind, and that these sexist associations have been perpetuated throughout the history of philosophy because of its endorsement of the Cartesian self. Bodily issues are ignored, the moral code that emerges from an isolated individual who comes up with principles that any rational person would come up with and/or agree to is skewed from reality, self-interest is too heavily favored, and the effects on people's character are likely to be missed, among other things. In sum, Hobbes's theory is problematic because of its focus on reason over emotion and its masculine view of emotion, its heavy individualism and egoism, and its abstraction from social context.

2.2 Feminist Responses

2.2.1 *The Ethic of Care*

Given the worries about sexism in traditional moral theory, some feminists remain skeptical about the possibility that the theories can be modified in line with feminist aims. In response, they propose an entirely different moral