

# THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF PERFECTION

Aristotle, Feminism, and  
the Complexities of Ethics

Michael Slote

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*In Memory of* ISAIAH BERLIN

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# THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF PERFECTION

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# Introduction

This book defends the idea that perfection—whether of virtue or of personal happiness—is impossible in principle, an idea that was originally introduced by Isaiah Berlin, but that neither Berlin himself nor anyone subsequently has really *argued* for. But the argument I shall be giving here is also very different from anything that could have occurred or was at all likely to occur to Berlin himself because its main inspiration consists in ideas and examples derived from feminist thought and the recent and only partially successful history of “the women’s movement.” In my opinion, many of the implications of that thought and history have been philosophically under-theorized, and I want to show in particular that the wrenching choices regarding career versus family and regarding loving/committed sexuality versus adventurous sexuality *that both women and men face nowadays* help to illustrate Berlin’s point about necessary imperfection more interestingly and poignantly than any of the examples that originally occurred to Berlin.

But if one comes to agree with the Berlin thesis, then it is no longer possible to accept the relatively harmonious or unified picture of ethical phenomena that we inherited principally from Aristotle and that still governs much philosophical thought about virtue and human good. Aristotle believed in the unity of the virtues (to have one virtue one has to have them all) and to that extent held that virtues cannot conflict with one another. But I shall be arguing

not only that there can be conflict among the virtues and among life's goods, but (what will turn out to be a further point!) that those conflicts illustrate the impossibility of our ever having a perfect life or being perfectly virtuous. Moreover, once one moves away from the simpler unified conception of human (ethical) life that Aristotle and almost everyone else have offered us, we end up with a much more complex and, if I may say, more interesting (though also less ethically optimistic) picture of what human life is and has to be, one that, as I eventually will argue, is perhaps more appropriate to our more complex *age* than anything that could have been thought of in earlier times.

The book also has implications that are in some sense larger than anything suggested by its title and subtitle, because of the way its main themes and arguments tie in with work that I and others have done on care ethics and moral sentimentalism more generally. These latter philosophical developments call into question the rationalistic assumptions and arguments that underlie Greek and Enlightenment ethical thought, both in their historical embodiments and as they influence present-day (Kantian) liberalism and (neo-Aristotelian) virtue ethics. By contrast, the present book attacks historical and contemporary versions of Greek and Enlightenment thought from a *different* direction: not by criticizing their rationalism, but by arguing against their general assumption that ethical phenomena can be understood in a *unified harmonious way that allows for the possibility (in principle) of perfection*.

The later chapters of this book also bring out another theme that its title and subtitle, which are already long enough, leave unmentioned. Care ethics in its most ambitious form seeks to offer accounts of "masculine" concepts like justice and autonomy in terms of the "feminine" ideals of caring about and personal connection with others. This represents a kind of balance between male/masculine

and female/feminine factors (as traditionally conceived), involving, as it does, a supposedly female *account* of *concepts* that are traditionally associated with men more than with women. But if we are to do care ethics or any other kind of ethics in an acceptable and fruitful manner, there *also* has to be a balance between those philosophical *methods* or *methodologies* that have been thought to come more easily to men and those that have been regarded as coming more readily to women. In particular, logical argument and philosophical analysis have to be balanced against or, better, integrated with emotional sensitivity and ethical intuition and insight, if we are to do ethics in the best way we can.

This is an idea I try to articulate in the Appendix to the present book (after the arguments for the impossibility of perfection have all been given). What I say there will depend on showing the philosophical importance of insight and good intuitions, and my efforts in that direction will, I think, rely on *personal examples and comparisons* in a way that I believe hasn't been previously attempted. The Appendix uses facts or assumptions about the different ways that Saul Kripke and David Lewis operated as philosophers to defend the importance of having good intuitions and of acknowledging that importance within the philosophical profession, and I also will mention facts about the reception of some of Annette Baier's ideas that I hope will illustrate and argue for the importance of philosophical insight in relation to philosophical analysis and argument. I also say something about how Nel Noddings's emotional sensitivity to and intuitiveness about ethical phenomena need to be supplemented by or completed in a more *analytical* approach to certain philosophical questions than she herself ever took.

Before I begin, in chapter 1, my main argument(s) for the impossibility of perfection, I think I need to say something (further) about why I shall be proceeding in the manner in which I have chosen to



proceed. Berlin gives hardly any arguments for the impossibility of perfection, and the one case or example that, more than any other, Berlin mentions as illustrating his impossibility thesis seems to me and has seemed to others to do nothing of the kind. Berlin saw the clash between liberty and equality as exemplifying the idea that perfect justice or an ideal state (or society) is conceptually impossible, and, to be sure, if we seek to create a more equal society, we will almost certainly have to restrict the liberty of those more talented or driven individuals who would otherwise make disproportionately huge amounts of money or attain inordinate power over others. We will presumably have to tax those people, and such a society would then perhaps be less than ideal because the well-off would presumably be unwilling on their own initiative to share greater wealth with those who are less fortunate. If, however, we imagine a more ideal society in which people *are* willing to share equally with those who otherwise would have less money or wealth, we can see that (fully nontaxed) liberty and equality of goods or benefits could at least in principle be realized together, so Berlin's favorite illustration of the impossibility of perfection doesn't help at all with proving that thesis.<sup>1</sup>

More generally, since Berlin doesn't give any real arguments for the impossibility of perfection, I shall in chapter 1 proceed toward my own arguments for that thesis rather than consider Berlin's views on their own. Where my arguments touch on his ideas or examples (or those mentioned by others), I shall note that fact. But I think the idea of the impossibility of perfection needs to be given a new lease on life, and that is what I shall be trying to give it here. On the other hand, I clearly owe a great, great debt to Berlin, a debt that is only partially repaid by my having dedicated this book to his memory. Isaiah Berlin was the first person clearly to enunciate the impossibility thesis, and when he did so, he was going against the grain of

long-standing philosophical tradition. So if we can actually give good arguments for that thesis, then we can credit him with amazing insight—even (dare I say it?) prophecy. But that is no substitute for the effort to work out and provide the actual arguments.

At this point, however, I think it might be useful if I offered a brief outline of the book chapter by chapter. Because I believe that the best or, in contemporary terms, most interesting illustrations of the Berlin thesis grow out of what we have learned from recent feminism, chapter 1 will talk about patriarchal ideas and values and about how feminist insights and ideals develop out of and in opposition to patriarchal notions, before I ease our discussion into a more direct consideration of the issue of necessary imperfection.<sup>2</sup> Patriarchy sees certain goods and virtues as gender-relative: for example, seeing adventurousness as a virtue in men, but not in women and regarding careers as good for men, but not for women. But feminism doesn't make these distinctions. Women who don't pursue a career are missing out on something, but by the same token, on typical feminist assumptions, men miss out on something important if they just have careers and are emotionally uninvolved with their families or with other people more generally. Chapter 1 maintains that this evenhandedness with respect to gender or sex generates Berlin-type problems for both men and women. Neither men nor women can combine real adventurousness with real prudence, or real adventures with real security, and chapter 1 argues that this entails the impossibility both of perfect virtue and of perfect happiness. It also argues that the choice between a personally fulfilling career and close personal relationships cannot be perfectly resolved. Adventure and security are merely "partial" goods, and to have either one of them is to be in a less than ideal situation vis-à-vis the other. Similarly, self-fulfilling accomplishment and intimate personal relationship(s) cannot be perfectly combined, and this too helps illustrate the impossibility

of perfect happiness. Furthermore, and using a more traditional example that doesn't come out of either patriarchal thinking or feminism, the virtue of frankness and the virtue of tact(fulness) also cannot be ideally combined. These traits are thus merely "partial" virtues, but the illustrative example that helps us show this has to be a bit subtler and more complex than anything (along these lines) discussed in the previous ethics literature.

Chapter 2 relates the previous discussion more directly to Aristotle and Aristotelianism. The idea of partial virtues/goods/values and the concomitant impossibility of perfect virtue or a perfectly happy life both contradict the Aristotelian picture of virtue and personal good. But we need to discuss that picture in greater detail in order to see the various ways in which it differs from any conception of the ethical that accepts the Berlin thesis. Also, since the argument I give for the impossibility of perfection makes such frequent use of the notion of a partial good or virtue (of a partial *value*), chapter 2 seeks, among other things, to compare this idea with the rather parallel notion of "partial denotation" that was introduced into the philosophy of language by Hartry Field. Chapter 2 also shows that the idea of partial values in no way entails ethical relativism or nonobjectivity. The theory that emerges from the impossibility of perfection is more complex or complicated than the Aristotelian view, but it makes just as strong a claim to objective validity or truth.

In chapter 3, I consider a variety of well-known views that differ less radically from Aristotelianism than acceptance of the Berlin thesis forces us to. But even if we have reasons of methodological conservatism to preserve as much of our Aristotelian tradition as we can, I argue that none of these other views is as realistic about and sensitive to ethical phenomena as what we get from arguing for and accepting Berlin's thesis. I then go on to discuss some significant

(further) *objections* to our earlier arguments in favor of the impossibility of perfection. It can be argued, for example, that perfection is possible if one is allowed to consign different (and conflicting) values to different periods of a life, so that, for example, one lives adventurously and/or for one's career early in one's life and then lives prudently and/or for personal/family relationships in one's later years. Chapter 3 seeks to answer this objection and a variety of other objections to the Berlin thesis.

Chapter 4 then compares what we have said about necessary imperfection with the philosophical literature on moral dilemmas and on (what Bernard Williams calls) moral cost. It might be thought that the possibility of moral dilemmas or cost would illustrate and argue in favor of Berlin's thesis, but our discussion will show that dilemma and cost don't *as such* favor the idea that moral/ethical perfection is impossible.

In chapter 5, I draw out some of the implications of our previous discussion in relation to care ethics and to the common philosophical ideas that underlie most of ancient Greek and modern Enlightenment philosophy. That philosophy claims and insists, first, that all our ethical values can be based in reason or rationality and, second, that this can be done in an ultimately harmonious and unified way; and whereas care ethics argues against the idea of basing our deepest values in reason, advocacy of Berlin's thesis represents a complementary challenge to the widely accepted idea of harmony or unity among such values. Together, then, what is said in the present book and what I and others have said in defense of care-ethical sentimentalism constitute a *joint challenge* to Greek and Enlightenment thought taken as a (bipartite) whole. We shall also see in chapter 5 that Romanticism occupies a kind of middle ground between Greek/Enlightenment thinking and the Berlinian approach I am advocating here.

In chapter 6, I step back from some of our main arguments and consider their positive implications for our total picture of ethical values. An ethical view or theory that allows for and insists on the impossibility of perfection sees ethical phenomena as much more complicated than Aristotelian approaches do. It agrees with Aristotle that some qualities or things are virtuous or good (for us) simpliciter, but it insists that there are also such things as partial goods and partial virtues, and that idea is clearly inconsistent with the unity of the virtues doctrine that Aristotle defended and maintained. So the Berlin thesis already leads to a more complex ethical picture than anything that comes down to us from Aristotle or any other Greek philosopher. But there are additional complications that are worth noting. Early in the book, I speak of dependent virtues, that is, of virtues whose status as such seems to depend on the presence of other virtues (one example is the way the virtue of conscientiousness seems to depend on the conscientious individual's having minimally decent or humane values). And I also early on mention the possibility of dependent personal goods, goods whose status as such depends on their possessor's possessing some other good as well. This category of dependency is not one that Aristotle or any Aristotelian has explored, and clearly it further complicates the/our ethical account of goods and virtues. But chapter 6 argues that things are actually more complicated than what I earlier said about dependent goods and virtues might lead one to think. Not only do some goods depend on others and some virtues on other virtues, but some goods depend on virtues and some virtues on goods. And, perhaps more surprisingly, it turns out that some virtues depend on vices or on certain personal evils and that some personal goods depend on personal evils or on certain vices. In fact, chapter 6 considers and argues for a number of *still greater* complications in our understanding of basic ethical values.

## INTRODUCTION

The Conclusion summarizes what has previously been said and attempts to put it in greater historical perspective, and the Appendix follows up on chapter 5 by arguing that in addition to involving a balance between male and female *content* (where this is understood in traditionalistic terms), ethical theory also requires a balance or integration of (what are traditionally conceived as) male and female *methods* of doing philosophy. But I have already spoken of this earlier in this Introduction, and it is time we proceeded to our main arguments.

# Feminism and Partial Values

## INTRODUCTION

I want to begin this book by talking about some issues in feminist ethics that I think are very interesting in their own right, but that also advance us—at a somewhat leisurely pace—toward the main, and the most controversial, issue in this book: the question of whether perfection—either in terms of happiness or in terms of the (possession of the) virtues—is a genuine possibility. The considerations I shall be discussing in what immediately follows were the actual entry point of my thinking on the subject of perfection, and we shall see how they naturally or inevitably lead in that direction. But further along we shall also have reason to directly engage and criticize Aristotelian views about happiness, virtue, and perfection, and these criticisms will also support the diametrically opposed conception of happiness, (the) virtue(s), and perfection that I will be articulating and defending in these pages. So let me begin.

In her groundbreaking work *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Carol Gilligan raised some very important issues about whether gender is relevant to morality.<sup>1</sup> She spoke of two different moral “voices,” one that approaches moral issues in terms of justice, rights, autonomy, and the invoking and application of moral rules or principles; and another that approaches them via a less rule-oriented personal connection with and concern

about others. Gilligan's work has been taken to imply or suggest that the first of these voices is associated more with men than with women; and the second more with women than with men. But various subsequent empirical studies (and some of Gilligan's own later work) have called this gender-correlation into question, and much of the interest nowadays in the second of these voices—the voice, as it is called, of caring and of the/an ethics of care—is relatively independent of any assumptions about the gendered character of the caring voice or moral “orientation.”

Nonetheless, Gilligan did raise some important issues about the relation(s) between gender and (accepted or valid) morality. But neither her discussion nor the vast literature that evolved out of it focused (very much) on ethical issues that are not specifically related to morality. Ethics in the largest sense not only asks about moral right and wrong and moral good and evil, but also considers questions about the good life (what kind of life is good for us) and questions about various virtues that lie partly or wholly outside morality proper. Thus when we praise resourcefulness and strength of purpose as individual virtues, we don't necessarily think of these qualities of character as specifically moral. For a resourceful person can be a moral scoundrel; but most of us, nonetheless, think of his resourcefulness as a virtue, an admirable and praiseworthy quality of character. We are willing, so to speak, to give the devil his due. And similar things can be said about strength of purpose.<sup>2</sup>

I mention these other, nonmoral aspects or foci of ethics for a reason. Theoretical (as opposed to popular and/or psychological) discussions of the relevance or role of gender haven't paid sufficient attention to the possibility that gender, or thinking in terms of gender, might play a pervasive role in our understanding of ethical questions that are not specifically moral. But I believe that gender issues do, in fact, arise *very generally* with respect to questions about the good life



(or human good) and questions about what sorts of character traits count as virtues, and to that extent recent theoretical discussion of the ethical issues that arise with respect to gender can be said to have proceeded much more narrowly than it makes sense for it to do. It will be my (immediate) purpose here to try to persuade you that this is so. (For simplicity's sake, my discussion won't take in issues about gays, lesbians, and the transgendered.) Our common or traditional attitudes and opinions about what is good for people and what counts as admirable or a virtue are very broadly contoured to considerations of gender, and we need to recognize that fact before we can move beyond such thinking in a way or ways that feminism would find desirable and that I myself completely endorse. The gendered way in which personal goods (ways of living a good life) and (nonmoral) human virtues are often conceived reflects patriarchal or sexist assumptions and attitudes, but some of the most important theoretical implications of this fact have somehow, surprisingly, been ignored, and the present chapter will attempt or at least begin to make up for that deficiency. Under patriarchy, various (nonmoral) values—various goods and virtues—are seen as gender relative, and I shall argue that a more enlightened feminist ethics needs to regard these values in a quite different, but somewhat unfamiliar, philosophical light.<sup>3</sup> This will require the introduction of certain philosophical/ethical distinctions into our discussion.

## SOME ETHICAL PHENOMENA

Philosophical accounts of human good can roughly be classified into three categories. There are hedonistic views that try to reduce all the good things in life to pleasure; there are desire-satisfaction or preference-satisfaction accounts that reduce the good things in life

to the satisfaction of our (rational) desires or preferences; and then there are “objective-list” theories that are essentially nonreductive and that try to allow, in intuitive terms, for the variety of important basic human goods.<sup>4</sup> It is easier to point out male-female distinctions if one focuses on the objective list theories, but in fact everything I am about to say can be carried over to the other two sorts of approaches to understanding human well-being/personal goods. However, those who have proposed objective list accounts of the (fundamental and intrinsically) good things in life—myself included—have made no mention of male/female differences in regard to such lists. Such things as pleasure, achievement, wisdom, security, love, and friendship have often appeared on those lists, but no one has ever pointed out that some of these items are more traditionally associated with women, some are more traditionally associated with men, and still others have (almost) never appeared to be anything other than general *human* goods.

Let’s begin with the personal good of security. The psychologist Abraham Maslow mentions it as one of the basic human needs and conceives it as a basic human good; and Martha Nussbaum in her objective list approach to what is good in life also mentions security.<sup>5</sup> But the good of security is in fact more traditionally associated with women than with men. You may at this point ask whether men and women don’t both need security, and, of course, in some degree they both do. But consider this. Adventure involves risk and danger (and novelty), and men are traditionally supposed to be interested in and/or to need adventure in a way women *aren’t* supposed to. And adventure is the opposite of, or inconsistent with, security, so to that extent men (as a class or on average) are traditionally thought to need security less than women do.

Moreover, I have never seen an objective list that included adventure as a basic human good, and yet I think many men have

over the centuries—over the millennia—regarded adventure as a good thing in their lives despite (or in part because of) all the insecurity and risk that adventure entails.<sup>6</sup> In fact, security and adventure constitute a rather naturally associated *pair* of opposites or contraries within the sphere of supposed human goods, and yet objective list accounts tend to ignore the adventure pole of that opposition and as a result treat security as if it were a human good *ueberhaupt* or in general—thus ignoring (what we could call) the feminine bias of including security without including adventure. And thus also ignoring the difference between such things as security and those items on the list—like pleasure and wisdom—that have always appeared to apply equally to males and females because (though this can't be the whole story) they seemingly *can't* be paired with some other putative basic human good that vies with or opposes them. (Pain and sometimes even ignorance can be instrumentally useful in life, but no one thinks of them as basic human goods.)

One irony of what I have just pointed out is that it in some measure runs counter to the common feminist (and realistic) assumption that traditional philosophy and traditional ethical theory are full of male bias. Nussbaum may not be subject to such bias, but it is interesting to see a male like Maslow ignore some putative traditional male goods in favor of an emphasis on a good that is traditionally, or in patriarchal terms, more typically and exclusively valued by women than by men. And why, more generally, do traditional male philosophers (though there may be exceptions I am not aware of) fail to mention adventure as something good in life? The Stoics can be seen as arguing for the importance of insulating ourselves from risk to our own well-being by becoming fully virtuous—since they held that virtue is sufficient for human good or happiness, and here, as with Maslow (and Nussbaum), the assumption seems to be that

security is an important good; but, once again, adventure (not to mention novelty) is nowhere in the ethical picture. And I would want to argue (though not here) that one can detect a similar bias against adventure in Plato and Aristotle. What are we to make of this bias against a value that is traditionally associated with males rather than females?

Now we have just been talking about personal goods, the good things in human lives, but what we have said also carries over to views about the virtues, about what kinds of character traits are praiseworthy or otherwise. The distinction between things that are good for us and admirable features of our character—what we also call virtues—was somewhat obscured in ancient ethical thought by the idea that a trait doesn't count as a virtue unless it is typically useful to those who possess it. This last idea is sometimes called eudaimonism, and all ancient ethical theories were eudaimonistic; but we nowadays are not as inclined as the ancients were to see each virtue and the combination of all the human virtues as necessarily tending to produce (this-worldly) happiness for the person who has the virtue(s). After all, certain virtues seem to require self-sacrifice. So I am going to assume that there is a difference between what counts as a human good or good for us (conducive to our happiness) and what counts as an admirable trait or virtue. And in fact even Aristotle, who was every bit a eudaimonist, believed there was a distinction to be (conceptually) made between the two. In his *Eudemian Ethics* (1248b 17–27), he points out that health or a healthy constitution is considered a good thing, but is not regarded as admirable or praiseworthy. So I now want to apply the lessons of what has been said above about what is good for us or makes for happiness to questions about what is admirable or counts as a virtue.

For example, philosophers often use the term “prudence” or terms like *prudentia* that can be translated into English as “prudence” to

cover the entire range or great swaths of human practical rationality, but consider the term in its ordinary sense. In ordinary English, it tends to imply a concern for long-term well-being (usually one's own) and a tendency or need to play things safe. In other words, if one is concerned with one's long-term well-being, one isn't supposed to take big chances; rather one is supposed to insure against risks to such well-being, and all this, I believe, is part of the meaning or connotation of the ordinary English term "prudence." But then someone who is prudent can't be a bold risk-taker and can't really, therefore, be *into adventures*. By the same token, someone who values adventure as a human good is likely to think that risk-taking boldness is not only acceptable but admirable, a virtue; and since prudence as ordinarily understood is inconsistent with such boldness, the typical or traditional male who values adventure will regard prudence as less than fully admirable. By contrast, traditional women who value security over adventure will have some tendency not to see risk-taking boldness as a virtue and to view prudence unequivocally as an admirable trait, as a virtue. And, of course, the opposition here has been played out in marriages since time immemorial, with husbands wanting to take risks that their wives try to rein them in from. (Obviously, this has something to do with wives' typically greater concern for actual or potential children, but I think it has also in some degree been independent of that factor.) What are we to make of all this?

So far I have just spoken of one familiar aspect or area of human goods and virtues where patriarchy sees or thinks it sees male/female differences. But let me mention another such aspect or area, before we go on to try to account for or understand these supposed differences in philosophical *and feminist* terms. And let us talk now not about the goods that objective lists typically ignore, but about goods that are mentioned on (almost) all such lists. The typical

objective list contains both love/friendship and achievement/success as goods—along with wisdom and pleasure as well. But wisdom and pleasure (or at least certain kinds of pleasure—of which more hereafter) aren't oriented toward one sex or gender more than the other, whereas love/friendship and achievement (in opposite ways) are traditionally thought to be. It is the stuff of pop-psychology and accounts of pop-culture that women are into friendships with one another and into close relationships with their children much more than men are and that one thing that prevents men from such “affiliative” interests is their preoccupation with their careers. There is much more talk of “distant fathers” than of “distant mothers”; and though there is lots of “male bonding” when men are young, female relationships are often said to last longer and be more emotionally intense than those of males. And, of course, men have traditionally been involved in/with their careers and with the achieving/accomplishing of certain career goals much more than women have been, and such involvement seems to some extent to be psychologically inconsistent with the preoccupation with and absorption in friendships and family love that (more) typically or traditionally have characterized women's lives.

So philosophically devised objective lists of human goods typically contain some goods that are traditionally regarded as gendered and others that are typically or traditionally thought of as applying fairly equally to both males and females: a fact that, I believe, has not previously been noted and that, more than any other consideration, led me toward the writing of the present book, *once I had noticed it*.<sup>7</sup> Now I could go on with further examples, but I think it will probably be more useful if, given the complexity of what has already been said, I try to sort things out a bit. The phenomena we have just been describing need to be conceptually and ethically clarified, and to that end I would like now to introduce some distinctions that take

us beyond our previous discussion, but will help us toward a better understanding of the philosophical and ethical implications of what I have already said. Intuitively, or in commonsense ethical terms, certain virtues and goods seem (in a sense to be specified) to be *dependent* on other goods or virtues. On the other hand, certain goods and virtues *don't* seem to be relevantly dependent; and, as I shall now show, we need to be able to make such a distinction in order to get clearer about the philosophical/ethical issues raised by our previous discussion.<sup>8</sup>

## DEPENDENT VALUES

The word “values” can be used as an overarching term to designate both personal goods and virtues, but I shall mostly be speaking of goods or virtues in particular; and let me explain the distinction between dependent and nondependent virtues and goods by describing some examples that are for the most part not tied to issues of feminism. Some people think conscientious adherence to duty is always and necessarily a (moral) virtue; but others disagree and say that where someone’s conscience is really aberrant and inhumane, there is no virtue in adhering (rigidly) to it. Thus take the supposed conscience of the Nazi who feels it is his duty to eliminate, to help eradicate, all Jews and homosexuals. We think such a person is inhumane, monstrous, and certainly immoral, but do we give him some credit for at least being conscientious about his perverse values? Some will say yes. But others would certainly disagree and maintain that such conscientiousness is in no way virtuous, that conscientiousness is not a virtue when it is based on inhumane and indecent values. And this view is equivalent to saying that conscientiousness is a dependent virtue and that it depends on one’s having

relatively humane or decent values to be conscientious about. On such a view, in other words, the virtue of conscientiousness necessarily depends, for its virtuousness, on the (presence of the) virtue of humanity or the virtue of basic human decency.

Take another example. Many of us regard humility as a very important virtue, but is its status as a virtue really independent of someone's having other virtues? Is humility a virtue, for example, in someone who possesses no (other) attributes anyone could reasonably praise or be proud of? Quite possibly not; and in that case humility could be viewed as an inherently dependent virtue: dependent on having some other significant virtues, though perhaps not dependent on having any other *particular* virtues.

Finally, one can argue that civility and courtesy count as social virtues (virtues of the society in which they occur) only if the society they characterize is substantially a just one. The civility and courtesy that could be found in the antebellum American South, for example, seem rather empty, superficial, ironic, and hypocritical in the light of the massive injustice(s) that pervaded that society, and if we take this seriously, we have reason to say that social virtues like civility and courtesy necessarily depend, for their status as virtues, on (the presence of) the virtue of justice—that is, the justice of the society in which the civility and courtesy may flourish. And a parallel dependency may for similar reasons exist at the individual level as well. The courtesy or civility of any given person may seem to be or count as a virtue, as admirable, only if she or he is personally just (or moral) to a substantial extent.

Dependent *personal goods* can also be recognized or thought to exist in a number of contexts. Imagine, for example, someone who has just been fired from a job and who is with a male friend who is trying to console her. But the friend lets it somehow slip that he has doubts about how good his friend really was at the job she has just



lost, and, as a result, his efforts at sympathy have the tone and character of condescension. The woman who has just been fired, seeing this, might very well angrily say to her friend: I want your respect, not your pity. And what I think she is saying, in part, to her friend is that mere pity, or sympathy without respect, isn't going to help her much in her present situation. In other words, putting the matter somewhat more objectively, we can say that given how demoralized the woman is feeling at present, sympathy can count as a good and be helpful to her only if it isn't mere pity, only if it is based in or accompanied by a relevant form of respect that can help her toward regaining her self-confidence. And if what she is saying makes sense, then it makes sense to suppose that the good of receiving sympathy can in some and perhaps in all cases depend on (being accompanied by) the good of being respected (or shown respect). (As I have indicated, we can also put this in terms of the idea that the good of receiving sympathy depends on that sympathy's not constituting a kind of mere or sheer pity.)

Finally, we find the idea of dependent goods in some widespread forms of thinking about the good of sexual pleasure. Many people would say that sexual pleasure is a good thing (in one's life) only if it occurs in the context of a committed or loving relationship, and this view amounts, in our terms, to the claim that the good of sexual pleasure depends on the good of having a committed or loving relationship.<sup>9</sup> But many people would disagree, and that disagreement might be thought to have a gendered character because at least traditionally it is women who think the good of sexuality depends on the presence of love, and men who think, or tend to think, otherwise.

And note the contrast with other forms of pleasure. Almost no one thinks aesthetic pleasure or enjoyment is more relevant to a particular sex/gender, and it is difficult, in addition, to see how the

good of such enjoyment necessarily/inherently depends on any other particular form of personal good. Similarly with the pleasure of a hot bath or sauna or of a good meal. And though the idea that certain virtues aren't dependent on others is potentially a hostage to Aristotle's thesis of the unity of the virtues, certain virtues (e.g., patience?) may seem to be independent of others if we don't accept or (as I intend to do) offer arguments against that thesis. So there is a distinction to be made between dependent goods and virtues and goods and virtues that aren't or don't seem to be inherently dependent on other goods or virtues, and I propose to rely on that distinction in what follows.

Thus our final example of a (possibly) dependent good, the example of sexual pleasure, turns us back toward ethical issues concerning gender. But what we have said in this section on the whole also gives us some philosophical tools for better understanding what is happening and what is being (erroneously) thought, when people hold that there are gender differences with respect to human goods and human virtues. So let us now revisit some of the earlier-mentioned cases where gender differences might seem to be relevant or at least often are assumed—and let us see how the distinctions made in the present section can help us illuminate (our thinking about) such cases.

## FROM PATRIARCHAL TO FEMINIST VALUES

I am going to argue now that some of the gender differences that have been thought to exist respecting various human goods and virtues reflect patriarchal values that need to be transcended or obliterated in the name of feminist ethical ideals and aspirations. The concept of dependent goods and virtues is useful in clarifying the

social attitudes and thinking that prevail under conditions of patriarchy—though, as we have already seen, this notion also has a wider ethical application and usefulness. So let us return to our previous examples of supposed gender differences and see how the new notion, the new distinction, works to help clarify their ethical character. But first some preliminaries.

Under patriarchy, adventure isn't supposed to be *for women*, and adventurousness and a willingness to take bold risks are not supposed to be virtues in or for women. (Even apart from adventure in the strictest sense of the term, women aren't supposed to take risks or be bold and adventurous in their decisions, e.g., about whom to marry.) On the other hand, men are supposed to be willing to take risks, and prudence in its ordinary sense isn't supposed to be so univocally a male virtue as it is supposed to be a female one. And, of course, adventure (i.e., living adventurously) is widely considered quite proper and desirable for men at least in their relatively youthful years. In that case, we can say that patriarchy views adventure as a gender-relative good and adventurousness as a gender-relative virtue. These things are, respectively, good and virtuous only for or in men. And by the same token, patriarchal values see safety or security as clearly a good for women, but not so clearly one for men; and they regard prudence as clearly a virtue in or for women, but not so clearly one in or for men. Similarly, patriarchy considers career fulfillment to be appropriate and good for men, but not for women, and because of the difficulty most people have in pursuing a career while also being "family-oriented," it sees such family orientation as more unequivocally a good for women than for men. But now we need to bring in the notion of (ethical) dependency.

We earlier noted that some people think the good of sexual activity or pleasure depends on the good of love, the having of a loving or committed relationship in which the sexual activity or

pleasure occurs; and we noted that others disagree. But these differences in fact (to some extent) reflect some patriarchal attitudes and ideas about gender differences and the role dependent goods play in those differences. For, very simply, patriarchy seems to regard the dependency of the good of sex on the good of love as itself holding only in relation to (relative to) the female gender. And in relation to males, it typically tends to hold that no such dependency exists. In other words, patriarchy appears to hold that *for women* the good of sexual pleasure (if it can really ever *be* a good thing for them) depends on the(ir having the) good of a loving relationship; but it holds that for men the good of sexual pleasure *doesn't* depend on the(ir having the) good of love.

However—and this is a new theme—I wouldn't want to deny that specifically moral assumptions/attitudes influence and help explain the patriarchal attitudes toward various goods and virtues that we have just been describing. If under patriarchy it is thought that uncommitted or “free” sexuality is not a good thing in women's lives, that is surely at least in part because it is thought that it is always wrong for women to enjoy sex in such circumstances, wrong in a way that is not presumed to be (universally) wrong for men. This is the so-called double standard understood in a strictly moral or moralistic sense. But it is also interesting to note that this moralism then seems to lend itself to attitudes about what is good for people that may not strictly follow from the original moral assumptions. Just because it is wrong, say, for a woman to engage in uncommitted sexual activity, it doesn't automatically or obviously follow that she gains nothing good for herself by or through such immoral activities. After all, we think a bank robber gets something good for himself if he steals money, and although the general tendency of eudaimonistic Greek philosophy has been to deny this rather commonsense view, it *is* a commonsense view. And so one would think

that the transition from assuming something is morally wrong to assuming one doesn't derive some personal good (immediately) from it wouldn't be or have to be so quickly made as it seems to be made under certain patriarchal assumptions and attitudes. I don't think patriarchal views leave a whole lot of room for the possibility that women who engage in uncommitted sex are acting immorally but enjoying something very good for themselves. But I'm not sure. Perhaps the patriarchal idea is simply that it is wrong to enjoy the definite good of sex outside of committed relationships (specifically, marriage); and if it is, then the idea that the good of sex is gender-relative wouldn't really or necessarily be part of the patriarchal point of view. However, from what I have seen and heard (I came of age in the late 1950s), patriarchal or sexist attitudes at least sometimes involve the idea, the view, that sex isn't a good thing in women's lives if and when they indulge in it outside of marriage, and this is in effect to treat such sexual activity or sexual enjoyment as a gender-relative good.

Note too that the same issues basically arise with respect to all of the supposedly patriarchal attitudes or views we have been describing. The idea that adventure isn't a good thing for women may be influenced by the thought that (given the way things are in the world) adventure puts a woman's chastity, her honor, at risk, and so moral thinking would once again be influencing ideas about what is good for women. And here I don't think it at all plausible to assume that patriarchy sees unnecessary risk-taking and adventuring as morally wrong for women, but is happy to acknowledge that they gain a good thing in their lives, adventure, when they act thus immorally. Somehow in this case the assumed immorality and probably other factors (e.g., ideas about how men should protect the "weaker sex") don't seem to allow for any slippage between moral goodness or acceptability and what is considered good or beneficial

in personal terms. And in any event, adventurousness is clearly not traditionally considered to be any sort of virtue for women, even if that assumption is influenced by the thought that it is immoral for a woman to risk her honor by deliberately courting risk and adventure.

Similar conclusions hold, I think, with regard to the choice between career and family. The having of a career wasn't traditionally thought of as a good thing for a woman, but this attitude may very well have been influenced by the assumption that it is morally wrong for a husband or father to let his wife or daughter help support him and also morally wrong for a woman to seek a career outside the home when she has the opportunity (which is sometimes not the case) to be fulfilled and useful inside the home. The idea that a career is something that women can derive great benefit from, but that it is selfish or wrong for them to want to have isn't a particularly familiar one, and so I think that with regard to this example and the others we have discussed, patriarchal attitudes are pretty much as I have indicated. Moral considerations or moralism may feed the idea that certain goods and (putatively nonmoral) virtues are gender-relative, but the assumptions about gender relativity are nonetheless definitely *there* in much traditional thinking about men and women—even if not nearly as explicitly as the present discussion has attempted to make them.<sup>10</sup>

But surely we want to question all these patriarchal attitudes, values, and assumptions. The concepts and distinctions we introduced in the last section and have applied in the present section help us to understand what patriarchy is (or often is) committed to, but they don't seem to help us to criticize patriarchy or get beyond the typically invidious distinctions it makes between males/men and females/women. In order to do so, we of course have to put the specifically sexist or patriarchal (moral) assumptions I have just

briefly discussed or alluded to entirely behind us. But what will also help us in philosophical terms to criticize and move beyond patriarchal views and attitudes and toward a feminist ethical picture of the basic values of our lives is some new ethical/conceptual distinctions I haven't yet mentioned. We need to introduce a new category of value, a new way of thinking about or parsing goods and virtues—we need the notion of a *partial* value, of a *partial* virtue or human good.

## PARTIAL GOODS AND VIRTUES

I take the nomenclature, and to some extent the idea, of partial values not from the ethical doctrine of partialism (according to which we should accord more concern to those near and dear to us than to mere strangers or people we only hear about and never will meet), but from Sigmund Freud's notion that (e.g.) sadism and masochism are partial instincts.<sup>11</sup> We don't need to subscribe to any part of Freudianism in order to make conceptual use of what Freud has in mind here, and it turns out, in fact, that there is an interesting analogy between what Freud said about sadism vs. masochism and what can be plausibly said about certain human goods and virtues. The opposition between (the desire for the good of) security and (the desire for the good of) adventure mirrors or parallels the Freudian opposition between sadism and masochism, and this way of seeing things will turn out to help us formulate and justify some of the most important criticisms feminist theory wants to make and has made of patriarchal or sexist attitudes and traditions.

In Freudian theory, sadism and masochism are "paired opposites;" they both have a tendency to operate in any given individual in erotic/neurotic contexts, but those tendencies (obviously) work

against one another in various ways. And something (conceptually) similar can be seen to operate in the sphere of ethics. However, rather than work at this point with our previous examples of security vs. adventure or career success vs. affiliative (or relationship) goods, I want to introduce a new kind of case, one that I believe illustrates the idea of (paired) partial values so clearly and forcefully that it can then be used as a basis for better understanding the ethical oppositions that we have previously been discussing.

Everyone recognizes that the virtues of frankness and of tact stand in some kind of opposition. They are naturally seen as paired and opposed because there are so many situations in which a choice has to be made between being tactful and being frank, situations in which one cannot exemplify both of these qualities of character. But an Aristotelian take on such issues would want to hold that whenever there is a choice between tact and frankness, there is a completely *right* choice in the matter. That is (at least in part) because Aristotle and many Aristotelians accept a doctrine of “the unity of the virtues” according to which one has to have all the virtues in order to possess any single one of them.

However, I don’t believe that what we regard as virtues are as well-behaved as the unity doctrine and other aspects of Aristotelianism assume, and I think the issue of frankness vs. tact helps illustrate this point. On the Aristotelian view (and speaking rather roughly), frankness and tact never clash *as virtues*. In any case where tactfulness is called for, frankness (being frank) wouldn’t count as virtuous or praiseworthy—quite the contrary. And in that case when one acts tactfully in response to situational ethical requirements, one’s lack of frankness will simply not be open to ethical criticism. Now recent discussions of moral dilemmas and moral cost should make us suspicious of these Aristotelian ideas; but I would like to articulate my own suspicions by mentioning a case



where it seems to me the Aristotelian take on frankness vs. tact doesn't hold water.<sup>12</sup>

Imagine that you have a friend who is always getting himself into abusive relationships that eventually turn sour and become intolerable for him. You have previously pointed this out to the friend; but he says he has no idea what you are talking about and enters into new and abusive relationships without seeming to have benefited in any way from what you or other friends have told him. (He also isn't willing to talk to a therapist about his problems.) So imagine further that your friend comes to you after his latest relationship has broken up and deplores the awful bad luck (as he puts it) that has led him once again into an unhappy and unsuccessful relationship. But he has no idea how abusively he has been treated (in this relationship or the others) and simply asks you, implores you, to tell him why you think this sort of thing is always happening to him. "What am I doing wrong?" he asks. However, you have told him in the past that he has a tendency to accept abuse, and you don't believe there is any chance he is going to change his ways or his thinking. (Assume he is an older man.) So what do you say to him?

Well, since he is imploring you to tell him what you think, you might (once again) be frank with him and explain the role he himself plays in bringing about these disasters (e.g., by accepting abuse, from the start, in the relationships he enters into). But you have every reason to believe (let's assume) that if you say this to him, it won't really register with him or make any difference to his future behavior; whereas, *if you just commiserate with him and say that you don't understand how he can be so unlucky*, he will feel much relieved or consoled by what he takes (or would like to take) to be your understandingness and what is clearly your sympathy vis-à-vis his situation. So what do you do? I don't think there is a right answer to this question. In other cases, there is reason to choose tact over

frankness or frankness over tact, but in the present case I think ethical considerations are finely balanced, and one's eventual choice of either the tactful or the frank thing to say may show more about oneself than about the ethical issues operating in the particular situation I have described.

Moreover, and this is the main point, whatever choice one makes will be less than ethically ideal. If one is tactful, one will have compromised one's frankness (or honesty) with a friend who is imploring one to be frank, and to that extent one is open to the (mildish) criticisms that what one has done is less than ideal and that, more particularly, one has shown oneself to be somewhat lacking in the virtue of frankness. By the same token, if one is frank, one will have acted in a way that isn't entirely kind (or tactful), and, once again, what one has done will count as less than ethically ideal. Or so at least it seems to me. But if this take on the situation I have described is correct, the doctrine of the unity of the virtues is at the very least called into question; and, again more importantly for present purposes, we can see that—just as sadism and masochism war against one another as instincts according to Freudian theory—frankness and tact war against one another *as ethical virtues*. For if one is frank in the situation described above, one will be *lacking* with respect to tact or kindness; and if one is tactful, one will be *lacking* with respect to frankness or honesty (with or toward a friend). Aristotelianism cannot admit this kind of ethical possibility; and in the light of what we have said about the previous example, we can conclude that neither frankness nor tact can count univocally and unqualifiedly as a virtue. In that case, and on analogy with what Freud says about sadism and masochism, we can say instead that frankness and tact are both *partial virtues* and, therefore, *partial values*. For these two qualities are paired opposites, and in some situations where they clash, acting on either one of them will be ethically less than ideal.<sup>13</sup>

There are no exact precedents for the notion of a partial virtue in the literature of ethics. (As we shall see in more detail in what follows, previous work on moral dilemmas and moral cost doesn't in fact move us toward the idea of partial values and necessary imperfection.). But the idea of partial values not only helps us understand the paired opposition between frankness and tact, but can, I shall now show, be useful in clarifying some of the issues of gender that we have discussed above. I believe, for example, that security and adventure are best conceived as mutually opposed (and paired) *partial goods*, and that the opposition between the related virtues of prudence and boldness (or adventurousness) is likewise an opposition between what are best conceived as (paired) partial virtues.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, a life of careerism (in the best sense) may be a good life, but it undercuts or lessens the possibilities of good relationship; and the same, of course, holds in reverse. And rather than say that career success or achievement is an unqualified or unconditional good thing (in life), I think we should say that it is a partial good. For similar reasons, we should say that being involved in or cultivating good close loving personal (and, especially, familial) relationships is not univocally a good thing—since it detracts from the possibility or likelihood of significant achievements in a challenging career. Rather, it is a partial good, one that vies with or against this other partial good (and can be seen as paired with it).<sup>15</sup> And there is a contrast, therefore, to be drawn here between goods like affiliation and career success, on the one hand, and wisdom and aesthetic pleasure on the other. These latter don't seem to oppose either each other or other things we think of as fundamental human goods, and so there is no reason to regard them as anything less than personal goods simpliciter. So the objective lists of human goods that have been offered in fact contain some merely partial goods and other goods that are good in an unqualified way.<sup>16</sup>

Now this way of seeing things stands in marked contrast with the views or attitudes we earlier attributed to patriarchy. According to patriarchal attitudes or values, career success is good for men and not for women. But using the notion of a partial good we can oppose such patriarchal notions in the name of feminist ethical ideals. The feminist thinks careers should be as open to women as to men and so would want to repudiate the patriarchal or sexist notion that careers and/or career success are gender-relative goods. But feminists have not been as clear as I think they might be on what they positively think about the choice between career and an emphasis on affiliative goods. They have seen that women have to choose whether to give themselves fully to their careers and have seen that doing so will or can make it impossible to fully realize affiliative goods or values. They have wondered whether one can somehow balance and compromise these goods, and have often deplored the fact that men don't seem to face a similar hard choice.

But men in fact do have to face such a choice. If they go completely with their careers, they miss out on some deep affiliative values. They end up as "distant fathers" and "part-time husbands," and even if such men aren't capable of recognizing the grave loss that that entails in and for their lives, many women can. And that, perhaps, is why so many fewer women find it easy or acceptable to give themselves entirely to their careers.<sup>17</sup> The idea that the good of close, loving relationship(s) and the good of career success are (merely) partial goods that are equally relevant to men and women enables us to correct, and tells us what is wrong with, the patriarchal notion that these goods are (differently) gender-relative. And it also helps us to see why the choice between career and family/affiliation is such a wrenching and difficult one (even if or when men don't see it as such).<sup>18</sup>

And the idea of partial goods and virtues also helps us understand what is wrong with sexist values in other (though related)

areas. The sexist thinks that women need security in a way that men don't; he (or she) values adventure for men, but not for women. And the same sexism sees boldness and adventurousness as male virtues but not as female ones. But, once again, the idea of partial values—of partial goods and virtues—enables us to articulate the or a feminist position about these matters. The feminist can and, I believe, should claim, rather, that both boldness/adventurousness and prudence are partial virtues that are equally relevant to men and women. Both men and women have to make the difficult choice or difficult choices between them; and, of course, they also have to choose between security and adventure.<sup>19</sup> And whatever they choose, they will lose out to a certain extent. If they choose security, they will miss out on adventure—and vice versa. If they choose prudence, they will seem to be ethically lacking in the virtue of boldness or adventurousness, but the completely bold and adventurous person will by the same token, I think, seem to us to be lacking in something we also think well of, to be lacking in a certain valued kind of prudence.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, the idea that we are here confronted with partial virtues and partial goods that are equally relevant to both men and women stands in marked contrast with the patriarchal opinion (as we have articulated it) that these virtues and goods are gender-relative. The idea of partial values thus allows us to *get beyond* the invidious gender-relativity of sexist thought and traditions, but of course one pays an intellectual/ethical price for recognizing the force and validity of this notion. For it makes us see that things can/could never be as good for us as we might wish them to be and that we ourselves could never be as virtuous, as admirable, as we would ideally like to be. But at least it makes this admission or concession in a gender-neutral and nonsexist way, and to that extent it exemplifies and furthers the feminist ethical vision of equality and justice between men and women.

But let me finally mention one further area in which the idea of partial values allows us to go beyond and in new terms criticize patriarchal/sexist attitudes and values. We spoke above about sexual activity and pleasure and noted the patriarchal/sexist view that for women, but not for men, these goods depend on the accompanying good of love and/or personal commitment. But young women these days (and over recent decades) have more and more explored the possibilities of sexual activity and pleasure that are based less on feeling and commitment than on a sense of (sexual) adventure, a desire for novelty and, yes, risk that has more typically characterized male sexuality in the past. And why not? In feminist terms, what's saucy for the gander should be saucy for the goose, and I would suggest, therefore, that there may (eventually) not be any gender relativity involved in the issue of whether sex has to be accompanied by love.

Does this then mean that sexuality is some sort of partial value? Well, I wouldn't put it quite that way. Sexual adventuring runs very deeply contrary to what we might call committed sexuality, i.e., the kind of sexuality that springs from and looks to some sort of foundation or inspiration in loving mutual commitment.<sup>21</sup> So maybe these two forms of sexuality and sexual pleasure can really be seen, then, as (paired) partial goods; and maybe that is what a more enlightened, feminist view of sexuality should say about the issues and values involved here. To think in this way is surely to go beyond the more confining and traditional patriarchal view that uncommitted sex is fine (and permissible) for men, but not for women. So, once again, the idea of partial values seems to enable us to advance beyond sexist notions, and the combination of that idea with the ideas of ethical dependency and gender-relativity that we used to articulate patriarchal views earlier on in this chapter thus allows us to say *in distinctively philosophical terms* how sexist attitudes invidiously differ from the ideas and ideals of a truly feminist ethics.<sup>22</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Where patriarchy sees gender-relative dependent or nondependent values, feminist ethical thought sees or can see paired partial values that are equally relevant to men and women. That is one main conclusion of this first chapter; and, of course, it summarizes a variety of different illustrations and arguments concerning human goods and human virtues. Many, indeed most, of the particular examples I used in discussing patriarchal values and attitudes are familiar from the literature of feminism and more generally. But I have attempted to generalize and unify those examples in philosophical/ethical terms and to show, again in very general philosophical/ethical terms, how very *differently* patriarchy and feminism see or conceive those examples (and others like them).

Of course, we know that patriarchy (or sexist traditions and institutions) characteristically treats girls and women in disrespectful and unjust ways: they are deprived of opportunities and privileges that are accorded to males; their ideas and their complaints aren't seriously listened to; one could go on and on. But the present chapter has indicated another characteristic feature of patriarchy, the fact that it tends to see various personal goods and virtues in gender-relative ways; and I have argued further that a less biased and more accurate *postpatriarchal* and *feminist* view of things requires us to see various goods and virtues as partial rather than as gender-relative. Given these conclusions, it would, I think, be interesting and fruitful to be able to say how the two just-mentioned characteristic features of patriarchy interrelate or interact, but that is a large topic that is probably best left to another occasion.

What, then, about the idea of different moral voices with which we began, the idea, familiar from Gilligan and a host of subsequent discussions, that there are two different basic ways—only very

roughly correlated with gender—in which people approach moral issues? How do our present findings, which largely refer to ethical issues that are not specifically moral, compare with Gilligan's and other views about moral differences?

Well, for one thing, what we have said here bears directly on feminist thought and values, and sheer talk of different moral voices doesn't bear a relevance to feminism on its face. The ethics of care that Gilligan mentioned and that was subsequently developed in the work of Nel Noddings and many others has been accused, in fact, of being retrograde and unhelpful from a feminist standpoint, because it sets up an ideal of caring that women are more likely to respond to than men, thus leaving women (once again) with an unequal burden of efforts and tasks in relation to men.<sup>23</sup> However, the/an ethics of care can be and has sometimes been deployed in a specifically feminist direction that allows one to *criticize* patriarchal/sexist attitudes and traditions (and whole societies)—I am thinking here of Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* and also, in fact, of my own work and that of Virginia Held and others over the past two decades.<sup>24</sup> A more specific and thoroughgoing comparison between care ethics and the concepts and conclusions of the present study must await a later chapter in the present book, but what should at least be clear at this point is that something like the idea of different voices can be applied to ethical topics outside the narrower moral sphere that Gilligan and many care ethicists have focused on. For better or worse, the issue of gender differences is as relevant to our understanding of ordinary human goods and (nonmoral) virtues as it has been to specifically moral questions.

But our discussion in this first chapter hasn't just been about issues of patriarchy vs. feminism. We have developed a notion of partial values that applies in a nonsexist fashion, but that also implies that things can never be as good for us as we ideally would like and



that we ourselves cannot be as virtuous or admirable as we might hope to be. If, for example, we are adventurous, we not only aren't prudent, but can be seen as *lacking* in prudence, and if, we are prudent, there will seem to be something less than perfectly admirable about our lack of adventurousness. And so on through the various other examples we have described. One natural reaction to these results would be to say they show that "one cannot have everything" or that "one cannot have it all," but in fact such claims are, in the strictest terms, somewhat misleading. As will be explained in subsequent chapters, it doesn't immediately or obviously follow from the claim that one cannot have all the virtues or all the good things in life that one's life cannot be perfect in virtue or happiness. But our notion of a partial good or virtue does imply/entail such imperfection, and the examples we have discussed were all intended to show that perfection either of the virtues or of personal happiness or well-being is impossible.<sup>25</sup> It is high time, though, for us to focus *more explicitly* and *more exclusively* on the Berlin thesis that perfection is impossible.

## The Impossibility of Perfection

In the previous chapter, I considered some issues about patriarchy and its (ethical) problems, and the notion of a partial value was brought in to help us arrive at a postpatriarchal, feminist ethical picture of the nature of certain virtues and certain goods. Partial virtues are organized (if that is the right word) into pairs of opposing character traits, and exactly the same, *mutatis mutandis*, can be said of partial personal goods. But our discussion didn't seek to fully generalize these (supposed or argued-for) facts in philosophical terms. The focus, as I have just indicated and as was obvious, was on one limited, though very important, area of ethical thought and action.

However, in order to make the case for the existence of partial values, I had to use some illustrative examples that are not specifically relevant to feminist ethical issues. The opposition between tact and frankness characterizes certain areas or aspects of human life quite independently, I think, of questions about sexism and how sexism can be overcome. And here at the beginning of the present chapter, I would like to reconsider that opposition of (what I have committed us to calling) partial virtues. If we do so, we shall see that the issues raised in the last chapter and what we said there by way of treating those issues have a much more general philosophical application and import than anything explicitly said in that previous discussion. That discussion directly bears on Aristotelian views about the virtues (and about human good), and most particularly,

or at least in the first instance, it bears on the central Aristotelian doctrine of the unity of the virtues. If frankness and tact conflict in important ways and yet both count as virtues, the idea of the unity of the virtues is at the very least called into question. But beyond that very specific doctrine there is also the Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian idea that morality, or right and wrong, can be anchored in the notion of what an individual possessing all the ethical virtues (which is what Aristotelians think ideal or perfect virtue consists in) would do and feel. And I want to argue here that that notion and the assumptions on which it rests are also deeply flawed. The ideal of having all the virtues and the ideal of ethical perfection (as I have mentioned previously, they turn out not to be the same thing) are in fact absolutely unrealizable.

Now I am not the first person in recent years or decades to have suggested that perfection (of the virtues) is (in principle or noncontingently) impossible. This is a familiar, a major, theme in the work of the late Isaiah Berlin. But Berlin really doesn't *argue* for the impossibility of perfection. On the basis of a few of roughly described examples, he just *says* that perfection is impossible; and I think we want to do more than that. We want or should want a clearer analysis of the issues and better arguments, before we agree with Berlin that perfection is impossible. (Of course, once we have an argument or arguments for that conclusion, we can credit Berlin with having had an important *insight*.)

So I want in what follows to provide (or talk again about) some more carefully crafted examples and offer a further or reinforced argument for the idea that imperfection—whether of virtue or of happiness—is inevitable. And we will need to centrally consider the Aristotelian idea of the unity of the virtues, the idea that in order to fully possess any given virtue, one has to have them all. Many philosophers in the West have questioned this thesis, but if we can show

that perfection is impossible, we can undercut that thesis more deeply than it has previously been possible to do—and we in fact end up with ideas that are *diametrically opposed* to the picture of virtue we associate with Aristotle (and with the unity thesis).

I want to begin (again) with an example we discussed in the previous chapter. Everyone recognizes that the virtues of frankness and tact (or tactfulness) stand in some kind of opposition. They are naturally seen as paired and opposed because there are so many situations in which a choice has to be made between being tactful and being frank, situations in which one cannot exemplify both of these qualities of character. Now Aristotelians want to say that whenever there is a choice between tact and frankness, there is a *right* choice in the matter, a choice not open to moral or ethical criticism. On their view (and speaking rather roughly), frankness and tact never clash *as virtues*: in any case, e.g., where tact is ethically called for, frankness wouldn't count as virtuous or praiseworthy—quite the contrary. So the Aristotelian will say that whenever one acts tactfully in response to (valid) situational ethical requirements, one's lack of frankness will simply not be open to ethical criticism. And similarly *mutatis mutandis* for acting frankly, when that is what a given situation calls for.

But as I argued in the last chapter, putative virtues like tact and frankness are not as well behaved as the Aristotelian picture of the virtues assumes, and the example I gave of the friend who is always getting involved in masochistic relationships but can't face that fact helps to explain why. Whatever choice one makes in that situation will be less than ethically ideal. If one is tactful, one will have compromised one's frankness with a friend who is begging one to be frank (and truthful), and to that extent one is open to the (mild) criticisms that what one has done is less than ideal and that, more particularly, one has shown oneself to be somewhat lacking in and

with respect to the virtue of frankness (or honesty). By the same token, if one is frank, one will have acted toward one's friend in a way that isn't entirely kind (or tactful), and, once again, what one has done will count as less than ethically ideal. Or so, at least, it seems to me. But if this take on the situation I have described is correct, the Aristotelian doctrine of the unity of the virtues is very definitely called into question. For it will seem that one cannot possess the quality of perfect frankness and the quality of perfect tactfulness at one and the same time, and it will also seem that the virtues of tact and frankness conflict and/or war against one another *as ethical virtues*.

Defenders of the unity thesis have argued that when there is a choice between what are ordinarily considered virtues, one of those virtues trumps the other, and a failure to act on that other in no way, therefore, show any lack with respect to that virtue or with respect to virtue in general. If I have to choose between mercy and justice and if in this case, justice really should prevail, then if I do the just thing, I will not have shown myself to lack or be lacking in the virtue of mercy because it can still be true of me that I act mercifully whenever *that* virtue is appropriate or called for. Such examples don't undercut the unity thesis according to most contemporary Aristotelians, and I think I can agree about that. But the choice between tact and frankness is not like the one between mercy and justice as just described. In the former situation there is no one right answer, no path of action required by valid ethical values, and one will be ethically somewhat compromised, act in a way that is ethically to some extent unsatisfactory, no matter what one does. This is a far cry from what Aristotelians (and I) want to say about a situation in which the virtue of justice clearly trumps the virtue of mercy.<sup>1</sup>

On the unity thesis, in order to fully have one virtue, one has to have them all, and since we have seen via our example that someone

who is completely tactful cannot also be completely frank, that thesis is very much open to question. But one can hold that ethical perfection, perfection with respect to the virtues, is possible without holding the unity thesis—one simply, or not so simply, needs to say that the virtues, even if they can be instantiated separately from one another to a substantial extent, can in principle be combined in one individual. If one says that, one will presumably then also say that such a person—someone combining all of the virtues—would be as ethically excellent as it is possible to be and count, in fact, as ethically perfect. But whatever choice one is inclined to make in the situation where tact clashes with frankness, one will be open to ethical criticism, and that, of course, entails that one will be less than perfect (or perfectly admirable). It doesn't immediately follow, however, that one will be less ethically admirable than it is possible to be, since, given the impossibility of virtue-perfection, the tactful person who is criticizable for not being fully frank may be as ethically admirable as it is possible to be—and similarly for someone inclined or disposed to be frank in the situation I described. For all I have said or want to say, they may, on grounds of their other admirable character traits and despite their ethical imperfection, be as *close* to ethical perfection as it is possible to be.

Now the situation I described is far from unique. There are other putative virtues that clash in the way that tact and frankness (sometimes) do, and I shall say more about (some of) them in a moment. But as a group such examples illustrate and argue for the main general claim I want to make in this chapter and in this book, the claim that perfection is impossible. Virtue is a dispositional notion—having a virtue is (roughly) having a disposition or tendency to act (and feel) in certain ways in various situations that may or may not arise. So even if the case I have mentioned and others to be mentioned hereafter are all hypothetical, they indicate, e.g., that there is a

conflict or clash between complete or perfect frankness and complete or perfect tact as ethical dispositions. And that is all that is needed to show that one cannot be perfect in respect to virtue or the virtues.<sup>2</sup>

This “cannot” is intended as a strong “cannot.” I am not just talking about human beings, but about any intelligent creature or creatures that could confront the kind of subtle, ethically important choice we described in our example. Indeed, if time allowed, I think it could be shown that even God or a god couldn’t be ethically perfect. This goes against a long tradition of Western theological and religious thought, but I think the example used just a moment ago could readily be reconfigured in such a way as to target the familiar idea that God must be and can be perfect (or perfectly good).<sup>3</sup>

I also believe that some important *additional* conclusions can be drawn from the example of tact vs. frankness and others like it. But before we do that, let me just mention one other familiar case where virtues clash, a case that, once again, can be used to argue for the impossibility of perfection and the falsity of Aristotle’s unity thesis. As I mentioned in the last chapter, some philosophers use the term “prudence” to cover just about all of practical rationality. But in ordinary English “prudence” refers (at least partly) to a tendency to play it safe with respect to long-term practical issues. People who take (unnecessary) risks with their safety or future well-being don’t count as prudent, and yet anyone who is adventurous in the way they live or pursue their careers precisely does take such risks. So even if we think prudence is a virtue, we also think that adventurousness, a certain kind of boldness in practical affairs, is also something of a virtue. For the spirit of adventure is something we admire, even (or, sometimes, especially) when we ourselves insist on being prudent about our futures (or the futures of those we love).

And one can't (overall) be both a prudent person and an adventurous one. Prudence and adventurousness clash as dispositions with respect to any given area or subject matter and with respect to our lives more generally. One can't possess both these virtues, and, more importantly, one can't possess both these virtues *as virtues*. Nor can we easily say that one of them takes precedence as a virtue over the other, and in situations where they clash (and in fact they clash much more generally or holistically than tact and frankness do), one is to some degree ethically criticizable or lacking whichever way one chooses or is inclined to go. If one chooses or is inclined toward adventurousness and risk, one is criticizable for one's lack of (the virtue of) prudence; and if one chooses or is inclined toward being prudent, one is automatically lacking in something we find admirable or praiseworthy. So this pair of opposed virtues illustrates the impossibility of perfection and casts doubt on Aristotle's unity thesis in much the same way that our previous opposed pair of tact and frankness does.

However, I promised just a moment ago to draw some significant additional conclusions from our discussion, and we are now, I think, in a good position to do that. And let me begin with a point of methodology. In a famous article called "The Causal Theory of Perception," H. P. Grice sought to show that certain Wittgensteinian theses about the use of language were mistaken: in particular, he sought to show that when we say that something looks as if it is red, we don't have to be committed to holding that it actually *is* red—even though that implication usually attaches to our saying that something looks (as if it is) red.<sup>4</sup> In developing his argument, Grice didn't just rely on certain examples and certain subtle (and, to my mind, entirely justified) intuitions about those examples. He developed a somewhat larger theory of linguistic usage in which to imbed what he had to say about the Wittgensteinian examples and ideas.



And I propose to do something like that here. I want to show you that we can take the examples just used (and others analogous to them) to develop or work toward a larger theory about the nature of virtue and the virtues. If we can (begin to) do that, there will, I think, be more reason, more motivation, for us to rely on all the examples in arguing against various central tenets of Aristotelianism. After all, Thomas Kuhn tells us that it takes a theory to beat a theory, and the case against Aristotelianism will be more forceful, therefore, if we have something systematic and theoretical (though less neat or unified) to set against it (or replace it with).<sup>5</sup> And it is the notion of a partial virtue or value that moves us toward the more systematic picture that our examples cry out for and help to provide. Frankness and tactfulness are opposed partial virtues; and the same can be said about prudence and adventurousness; and in the last chapter we also spoke of various opposed and partial personal goods: e.g., adventure vs. security, career/creative fulfillment vs. fulfillment in (one's) intimate relationships. Now the reader may have some doubts about these last examples or, indeed, about what we have been saying about partial virtues. But I will discuss some further doubts and worries in the next chapter, and for the moment I ask the reader just to take the ideas I have been advancing on approval. For the moment, I just want to see—and I hope readers will be interested in my showing them—what the theoretical implications of those ideas may be.

In the previous chapter I argued that frankness and tact are both *partial virtues*; for these two qualities of character are paired opposites, and in some situations where they clash, acting on either of them will be ethically less than ideal. Similarly, prudence and adventurousness/boldness are paired opposites that deeply clash with respect to any human life (or period of human life), and so, once again, we can, and I believe we should, regard each of these character traits as a partial virtue, rather than as a virtue simpliciter or unqualifiedly.

But notice how this takes us beyond the core idea that virtues inevitably (to some extent) clash or conflict. Such a claim refers to the incompatibility of certain supposed or putative virtues, and to that extent it is merely or purely relational. It speaks, for example, to how frankness relates to tact, but it doesn't say anything about tact itself or in itself as a virtue. But Berlin's thinking and our previous discussion take us beyond merely characterizing how certain traits relate to one another and involve a further conclusion or conclusions about those traits taken singly or in themselves. They tell us that we should regard those traits as in themselves necessary to perfect virtue and/or as partial virtues rather than as virtues simpliciter, and this further move has a theoretical significance beyond anything that is immediately at issue when one (merely) talks of a clash or conflict between virtues (or personal goods). Perhaps the best way to see this would be to invoke the only other *philosophical* discussion of (something like) the notion of partiality I have been describing that I know of. And it is a discussion, interestingly enough, that lies entirely outside the field of ethics: Hartry Field's well-known treatment of the idea of partial signification or denotation.<sup>6</sup>

Field introduced the notion of partial signification in an article that considered W. V. Quine's views about the signification or denotation (or reference) of common nouns. Quine had argued that an anthropologist in the field seeking to translate some hitherto untranslated language would presumably point to various objects and try to elicit from some native speaker the word in that language for that kind of object. But as Quine noted, when the anthropologist points, say, to a rabbit, he is also always pointing to some undetached rabbit part, and since an undetached rabbit part isn't the same thing as a rabbit, there is a problem as to whether the native speaker who, say, utters "gavagai" in response to the anthropologist's ostension of a rabbit means by "gavagai" "rabbit" or "undetached rabbit part"

(or even some other thing that is connected with rabbits but doesn't mean or refer to the same kind of thing as our "rabbit"). With respect to such a situation of "radical translation," it is going to remain indeterminate whether the native speaker means one thing or the other by "gavagai," and so, according to Quine, radical translation is radically underdetermined.

Now I don't propose to defend or further describe Quine's views in this area. The important point for present purposes is that Quine focuses on the fact or assumption that there are inconsistent hypotheses regarding the meaning of "gavagai" and claims that there is no way in principle to determine that "gavagai" denotes rabbits rather than rabbit parts (or the fusion of all rabbits). But Field takes these ideas in a new direction. Rather than focus on the mutual inconsistency of certain hypotheses concerning what "gavagai" really denotes or signifies, he introduces the idea that in the circumstances described by Quine, "gavagai" *partially signifies (or denotes)* rabbits and *also partially signifies (or denotes)* rabbit parts. (Similarly for the rabbit fusion, the "mereological object" that has all rabbits as its parts.) So rather than focus on the inconsistency of certain claims or theories about the signification of "gavagai" (together with other linguistic items), he proceeds to claim that "gavagai" partially denotes *each* of the entities that one or another of the mutually inconsistent theories or claims says "gavagai" unqualifiedly denotes. Rather than limit himself, like Quine, to speaking of how certain assumptions about the signification of "gavagai" (or any other general term) clash, he offers a single view of the signification of "gavagai." And this is like what we have done in offering a single view of the value status, say, of frankness as a partial value, rather than (merely) pointing out how that value clashes with others. (And just as we can talk of other values than frankness in that particular light, so too can Field apply his approach to *every other general term*.)

Thus the historically and currently somewhat familiar idea that certain virtues or values clash or conflict may to some extent point toward the conclusion that perfection is impossible, but it clearly doesn't itself tell us everything that can usefully be said about the (putative) virtues and goods we want to talk about. And the further step we have taken, involving as it does the concept of a partial value, can perhaps be better understood in the light of the parallel that can be drawn with Field's idea of partial denotation. To call some trait a partial virtue is not only to make the relational claim that it conflicts with a certain other (partial) virtue or virtues, but to characterize it as being in itself *so ethically important* that no one can be entirely admirable or perfectly virtuous in its absence.<sup>7</sup> And something parallel can, obviously, be said about partial goods and what we have said in describing them.<sup>8</sup>

However, Field also pointed out that his approach to denotation avoids a certain relativity that Quine's treatment has as one of its consequences. (The relevance of this to my own discussion of partial values was first brought to my attention by Otavio Bueno.) On Quine's indeterminacy view, the hypothesis or theory that "gavagai" refers to rabbits is true only relative to certain basic assumptions about translation, to a certain particular scheme of translation.<sup>9</sup> Relative to some other scheme, "gavagai" signifies undetached rabbit parts and relative to yet another, it signifies the fusion of all (whole) rabbits. But on Field's account, "gavagai" partially signifies rabbits, partially signifies undetached rabbit parts, etc., and this assumption, this fact, is not relative but absolute. And something similar can be said about the view of partial virtues and values introduced here. That frankness is (only) a partial virtue and that tact is a countervailing or opposed partial virtue is not relative to further assumptions, but counts as an absolute or objective ethical fact, given what we have said earlier. And to that extent there is no relativity in our

account of the virtues—we are not committed to some sort of ethical relativism, far from it.

To say that frankness or adventurousness is a partial virtue is *not* to say that its ethical status is somehow relative to our cultural or social attitudes and beliefs about the importance and value of these traits, and even though I think our ethical intuitions about various cases give us reason to believe that frankness and adventurousness are partial virtues rather than virtues simpliciter, this is an epistemic/epistemological claim that simply doesn't translate into the relativistic idea or thesis that our cultural/social/intellectual attitudes/beliefs are what *makes* these traits and others into (partial) virtues. So the more complex and (one could say) richer picture of human virtue(s) that results when one admits the idea of a partial virtue is not committed to any sort of relativism. We may be impugning the Aristotelian picture of virtue and the virtues, but what we are substituting purports to be just as ethically objective as Aristotelianism has always claimed to be. Of course, we haven't yet spelled out the details of the new and more complicated picture of virtue and personal good, but I hope to do more and more of that throughout the remainder of the present book.

Now what I am trying to do—and what many, many other philosophers, including Aristotle, have also attempted to do—involves a certain risk. To avoid relativism and be willing to talk of objective values—even qualified ones—is to be willing to speak of certain people's views about what is good for us or what counts as a virtue as mistaken. And I am and have been willing to do that. I have said that patriarchal views of what is good for us are mistaken, for example, and I have specifically implied that those males who have been raised to think of relationship values as insignificant or relatively unimportant will tend to lack something important in their lives. A person who never has any close personal relationships is missing

out on something good (in life) even if (because of the way they were raised or educated) they don't know or even suspect that that is the case. Similarly, someone who never ever has any sexual enjoyment is also missing out on something good, even if, again, they never suspect that they are missing something. Or so, at least, I am inclined to think. (A priest might well agree if he thought he had had to sacrifice something of some value in order to take up his higher calling.)

But isn't this arrogant? What right do I or anyone else have to claim to know more than others about what is good for us or a virtue? Well, moral philosophers frequently argue for specific moral views that they know many others—not just moral philosophers, but ordinary folk—will disagree with. It's part of the business, their business as moral philosophers, to do that sort of thing, and, of course, in doing so they assume a certain epistemological/epistemic (and ethical) burden and risk. In order to claim to know more or differently, they had better pay their dues in thinking more (and better) about moral matters than other people do or previous philosophers have. (Often this involves some standing on the shoulders of giants.) I don't think my situation in philosophizing about human goods and nonmoral virtues is really or substantially any different from that of someone doing normative moral philosophy in the strictest sense of the term. What we all do may sometimes and in some cases be arrogant—and certainly it may often be mistaken. But for philosophers not to pursue these issues and not to be willing to make judgments about other people's errors concerning what is good or virtuous in people's (or their own) lives own is to risk something other than arrogance. It is—if I may put it this way—to risk a kind of cowardice, to risk the (valid) accusation that we were so afraid of our moral shadows that we weren't willing to point out or argue for values that humankind has some reason to want to get

clearer about. Someone who isn't willing to say that patriarchy is unjust may not (to that extent) be arrogant, but they can be accused of blindness, insensitivity, pusillanimity, and even, probably, of injustice. And if it turns out that perfect happiness is impossible but that saying so rains on some people's parades, that could well be because the impossibility of perfection is, at least for some of us, an unpleasant truth that it takes a certain amount of courage to face or even consider. All the more reason for the *philosopher* to push on with these ideas—even if they make or will make many people uncomfortable.

And speaking of unpleasantness, I think I should at this point mention (what strike me as) some rather intriguing, but also at least somewhat *unfortunate or unpleasant* further implications of some of the things I said earlier. A parent who is neither prudent nor adventurous is certainly not a very good model for their children. But we have argued that a parent who is prudent in their attitude toward important issues in life is flawed to some degree as a person, and the same can be said for one who is adventurous about such matters. That much follows from our previous analysis. But then *any* parent will be somewhat flawed or imperfect as a(n ethical) model for their children, and being a model for one's children is part of what parenting is all about. It follows that no one can (in principle) be a perfect parent, even if they are as good a parent as it is possible to be. It follows, further, that no *family* can be perfect (as a family); and since the family is in some (possibly nonpolitical) sense the foundational or cornerstone institution of any society, the notion of a perfect society is also in principle unrealizable. However, this may not imply that perfect *justice* or a perfectly *just* society is impossible. I can't think of any reasoning along the above lines to argue for *this* conclusion—though one can't be sure that no one will ever be able to give a good argument for it. Still, the implications of our discussion for

our understanding of “family values” *are* pretty clear. And those implications are somewhat unpleasant or possibly (for some at least) disappointing.

But having said all that we have said in the past two chapters, it is time to retrace our steps. I want to spell out more of the implications of our approach, but in order to do so effectively, I think we first have to consider various objections to what I have already said. I want to do this in the next chapter, before we then go on (in subsequent chapters) to widen our perspective on the issues I have been raising and the approach I have been sketching.



## Alternative Views

Isaiah Berlin's idea that perfection of the virtues is impossible in principle seems to have largely slipped off the radar screen in recent moral philosophy. Under the influence of reviving Aristotelian virtue ethics, most of the focus of recent discussions of virtue has been on Aristotelian views that stand diametrically opposed (in a sense to be given fuller explication in what follows) to Berlin's conception of (the) virtue(s). In particular, the Aristotelian idea that the virtues constitute a unity, that one has to possess all the virtues in order to have any single one of them, has some currency at present. I have not criticized that view directly up till now and I don't propose to do it now. But my defense of a Berlinian conception of the virtues is implicitly a critique of the idea of the unity of the virtues, and if that conception can be made plausible, that will itself, I think, constitute the best possible argument against the unity thesis. Of course, on the face of it, the unity thesis seems wildly counterintuitive and goes completely against our prephilosophical ideas about virtue. But some forceful and interesting things have recently been said in defense of the unity of the virtues, and if we are to counter the (if I may say) attractive picture of virtue that the Aristotelian unity thesis offers us, I think we need to show how a realistic sense of the richness and complexity of ethical phenomena forces us to go in a quite different direction.

But has our previous discussion really accomplished that? Quite possibly not. I have discussed various examples and given a certain interpretation of their implications or significance, but I think other

interpretations are possible, and that means that there are some ways of questioning our previous conclusions that we need to focus on and answer—in order for the defense here of a Berlin-like view of the virtues and human happiness to really be successful. And I want to begin by considering two fairly recent discussions of the virtues that make use of examples quite similar to the one we mentioned about the friend who is always getting into abusive relationships. Both Gary Watson and A. D. M. Walker discuss such examples, but show no tendency to move in the direction of Berlin's ideas.<sup>1</sup> Watson, in fact, never (completely) abandons the Aristotelian unity thesis, and, interestingly enough, even though Walker does reject that thesis and move in the *direction* of Berlin's views, he stops well short of the conclusion that virtue-perfection is impossible. I believe, in any case, that focusing on these related discussions can help us see why it is necessary to focus on the *particular (kinds of) examples* I examined in previous chapters, if one wants to make a strong case for the Berlin thesis.

Then, after we have considered Watson's and Walker's views, I want to consider some presumed or putative counterexamples to the claims I have made about the partiality of certain (personal) goods and virtues. For example, to hold that security is a partial good is to assume that one cannot be perfectly or ideally happy or well-off during some period of one's life in which adventure is absent; and someone might claim that a life in which there has been an earlier period of abundant adventure can be perfectly or ideally wonderful during some later period of nonadventurous safety and security.<sup>2</sup> Arguments of this sort challenge our earlier views, and I want to consider a number of such arguments (or counterexamples) later in this chapter. But first let us look at Watson and Walker.

Watson's is the earlier and the more Aristotelian of these two discussions. His article "Virtues in Excess" begins by speaking of the

“straight view” of the virtues according to which various virtues can be possessed “in excess”: as, for example, when someone is too honest or too generous. But Watson notes that “the straight view . . . sever[s] the connection we ordinarily suppose there to be between developing a virtue and moral [or ethical] improvement.” And he concludes that the straight view is too simple to be plausible. Watson then moves on to consider what he calls the “due concern view” of the virtues, according to which a given virtue functioning as a virtue cannot lead to ethically bad actions. He takes it that this commits one to Aristotle’s unity thesis, and he spends much of the rest of his paper talking about what can be said for and against the unity thesis and/or the due concern view. Along the way, however, he mentions an example that involves the “choice” between frankness and tact, and I think we need to look at that example because Watson doesn’t take it to undercut the unity thesis or point us toward Berlin’s views.<sup>3</sup> Without knowing more, we or the reader may wonder whether this gives us reason to be suspicious of what I said earlier based on an example that is at least somewhat similar to Watson’s.

Watson’s example involves someone *A* who asks two people *B* and *C* for an opinion of his book. *B* is said to be characteristically more frank and straightforward than *C*, and *C* is said to be more sensitive to others’ feelings, more tactful, than *B*—and each responds accordingly. Watson says that each of *B* and *C* may be admirable in his or her own way; and he holds that in other circumstances, circumstances where there is a definite right choice between tact and frankness, both will or could do what was ethically required of them. But Watson treats the situation he describes as ethically “indeterminate” and holds that such cases reveal the moral/ethical individuality of individuals who might in other circumstances always do the same morally required thing. The difference of ethical “style”—as between frankness and tact—comes out in the case he introduces,

but Watson makes it clear that (he thinks that) the two individuals needn't differ with respect to their virtuousness and also seems to assume that neither style is incompatible with *perfect* virtue. (He says each is admirable in his own way and never hints that either need be less than *completely* admirable, that either need be ethically criticizable in any way.)<sup>4</sup>

Watson ends with the unity thesis still, as he sees it, intact. He has mentioned many interesting problems with spelling out that thesis, but doesn't treat any of them as showing the nonviability of the thesis. And I certainly want to grant that the example Watson gave doesn't particularly lead us toward Berlinian conclusions. But that is exactly why I chose the particular example I used in previous chapters to argue for Berlin's thesis. It is different enough and specific enough to allow one to have the sense that whatever is done in the described circumstances will be to some degree ethically unsatisfactory, and Watson's case is not of the right kind, and in any event isn't spelled out in sufficient detail, to make one feel that something ethically important is lost whether one responds as *B* does or as *C* does. I don't think the unproblematic character of Watson's example as he describes it at all challenges what we have said about a somewhat, or perhaps very, *different* choice between tact and frankness. So let's move on to Walker.

Walker argues that certain pairs of virtues are mutually incompatible *as virtues* and so he clearly rejects Aristotle's unity thesis. His favorite illustrative example of virtue-incompatibility, borrowed, as he acknowledges, from Watson, is the choice between tact and frankness/openness/straightforwardness/truthfulness; but Walker provides even less detail about cases (or any given case) of conflict between frankness/openness and tact than Watson does.<sup>5</sup> He does, however, draw some theoretical conclusions from this kind of example and others like it. He thinks such conflicts or incompatibilities illustrate the plurality of incommensurable values, and he goes

on to say that the person who “speaks openly while regretting that he must cause distress” may be in no way defective with respect to tact and may well have an entirely admirable character. And similarly for the person who “would resort to tactful evasion while regretting his lack of openness.” In other words, and despite the talk of regret, Walker seems to hold that there is nothing ethically unsatisfactory or criticizable about someone who demonstrates tactfulness or who demonstrates frankness/openness in the kind of situation he describes; and he goes on to say that the tactful person and the open person may be equally admirable, but *in different ways*. So Walker is a kind of pluralist about admirability, but he doesn’t take his examples of virtue-conflict to show anything about necessary or inevitable virtue-imperfection, and to that extent, then, he is a pluralist too about perfection (perfect virtue or admirability).

But the fact that Walker thinks the tactful person has reason to regret not having been frank or open and the open person reason to regret having to cause distress should give us pause with Walker’s conclusions. We should at the very least suspect that or wonder whether an example of the tact-frankness conflict can be found where the sense or notion of regret rises to an explicitly ethical level; and the particular example I have relied on of the friend who falls into abusive relationships was supposed to be just such an example. If the person who is frank in the situation I described is appropriately regarded as having done something ethically somewhat unsatisfactory—and similarly for the person who is or would be tactful—then it would be a mistake to follow what Walker says about his less fully described example and say that they are both “entirely admirable” in what they have done; and it would be a mistake to assume that such cases and conflicts merely illustrate an interesting value pluralism. Such pluralism does indeed run counter to the Aristotelian unity thesis, but it doesn’t acknowledge, what I

think our example should lead us to acknowledge, that the inconsistency of certain virtues threatens the very possibility of someone's being *entirely* admirable, or ethically perfect.

So our discussion of Walker and, just before, of Watson should help explain the sense in which my own views and those of Isaiah Berlin go beyond or differ from other conceptions of human virtue. And I hope it also helps make it clear how or why one might be justified in taking the further step away from Aristotelianism that Berlin and I have taken. For even while disagreeing with Aristotle, Watson, and others about the (potential) viability of the unity thesis and even while subscribing to the idea of inconsistent or conflicting virtues—which Berlin and I also, of course, subscribe to—Walker seems to want to insist that people can in different ways be perfect in virtue. And his assumption that perfect virtue is possible, which Aristotle, Watson, and others also never question, is precisely what Berlin has called into question and what I have sought to argue against in this book.

In fact, there is another (very relevant) possible position about the virtues that I haven't yet explicitly mentioned. Walker points out that one can reject the unity thesis while holding, nonetheless, that the virtues are all mutually compatible—and he cites Peter Geach as an example of someone who holds such a view.<sup>6</sup> That conception of virtue obviously differs from Aristotle's, but it differs less than Walker's does and much less than Berlin's views and my own do. So there are in effect four different positions one can take on the general issues we have just been discussing. Aristotle holds that the virtues are all mutually compatible and in fact constitute a unity, and he also holds that ethical perfection is possible. Geach thinks the virtues don't form a unity but are completely compatible and he gives no reason to think that ethical perfection is problematic. Walker believes that the virtues neither form a unity nor are completely compatible, but he too

doesn't question the possibility of ethical perfection. And finally, then, both Berlin and I deny the unity thesis, deny the compatibility of the virtues, and deny the possibility of ethical perfection.<sup>7</sup> This gives the sense, as I have expressed it earlier, in which Berlin's views and my own constitute the antithesis of Aristotelianism.

But in fact Berlin's ideas may be even more opposed to Aristotle's than my own clearly are. In particular, Berlin seems to have made the very un-Aristotelian assumption that various values are incommensurable or incomparable with one another and to have understood (his commitment to) pluralism to entail such incommensurability or incomparability; but my own argument for the impossibility of perfect virtue and happiness has in no way relied on such an assumption. For all I know, adventure and security (for example) may be *equally* important to (a good) human life, and my discussion of perfection has made no assumption(s) to the contrary. And even if security (say) is to a definite extent *more* important or valuable than adventure—or vice versa—our main arguments don't seem to be affected. So I don't think I need to invoke the ideas of incommensurability and/or incomparability in order to argue for necessary imperfection, and since Berlin thinks he does, his view is to that extent more anti-Aristotelian than my own.

In any event, both our views are further from Aristotle's than any other objectivistic ethical view that has ever been defended, and that fact, frankly, gives me pause. But we need to remember that Aristotle had less to work with than the embarrassment of ethical riches that we face and have to deal with nowadays. The riches I am talking about are facts and interrelated sets of facts about the complexities of human (and intelligent) life. Just think about it. Aristotle didn't know about as many different cultures as we do; and although he was well aware of the ways in which polities can conflict externally (e.g., by making war on one another), the societies he was aware of (Persia,

Athens, Sparta, Egypt, etc.) were culturally and ethnically much more uniform than modern-day pluralistic societies. The distinctive conflicts and issues of such societies were unknown to him, as were the issues of patriarchy vs. feminism and of individualism vs. collectivism (he arguably didn't have the idea of individual human rights). So what I am saying—and I agree this is somewhat superficial—is that we shouldn't be surprised if we nowadays want to countenance or can reasonably argue for countenancing a much more pluralistic and tension-full picture of human life and its ethical values than anything that could reasonably have occurred to Aristotle.<sup>8</sup> The kind of view Berlin defended and I am trying to expand on is *called for* in the modern or contemporary world in a way that it really wasn't in Aristotle's time. This is not (really) a philosophical argument for the philosophical conclusions I have been drawing contrary to Aristotle, but if one thinks the arguments I *have* given make sense, it should perhaps make one less reluctant to part ways with something as philosophically familiar and venerable as Aristotle's picture of the virtues. We can be nostalgic for a simpler/easier life and/or simpler/easier assumptions, but the way back seems, really, to be blocked, and I think we do best to reckon with, even struggle with, the more complex and richer (and, I think, less rosy) present and future that Berlin more than anyone else described and adumbrated for us.

But having now situated our approach in relation to other views, we still have to consider potential problems with or counterexamples to the ideas I have defended. It can be questioned whether the examples I have chosen have to be interpreted in the direction in which I have taken them—whether they show or justify as much as I have said they do. And so I want now to consider some very particular objections to what was said in chapters 1 and 2, beginning with an objection to what I said earlier about the roles of adventure and security in human happiness.



I argued in chapter 1 that security and adventure are partial goods. A life in which one or the other is absent is to some extent a less happy or good life, and I have said that no life can combine these (personal) goods. But is that really correct? After all, one might have security and adventure with respect to different aspects of one's life or at different times of one's life, and wouldn't or couldn't such a life combine these goods in a perfectly happy manner?

Here I am reminded of Flaubert's advice to be "regular and orderly in your life so that you may be violent and original in your work." And given our present purposes, the relevant thought is that one might have adventure in one's work while at the same time being secure or safe in one's life. But although I wouldn't want to deny that such a thing is possible, I don't think it helps the cause of those who want to argue—as against the thesis of necessarily imperfect happiness and against the idea of partial personal goods—that it is possible to combine adventure and security *in one's life*. The whole point of the Flaubert quote is that the violence and, presumably, adventure are in the work and *not* in the life. Of course, when this is the case, we may be able to say that (in some sense) there is adventure to be found *within* the given life, i.e., within the work that is part of that life. But what characterizes a part, the work, may not characterize the whole *tout court*, and that seems to be true in the present instance. The life Flaubert recommended and presumably (from what we know of his life) led himself is not an adventurous life—even if he was adventurous in his work. So I don't think this kind of example works against the idea that adventure and security are merely partial goods or in favor of the idea that they can be combined in a life that is perfect from the point of view of happiness. And similar conclusions are, I think, relevant to the associated partial virtues of adventurousness and prudence.<sup>9</sup>

However, I mentioned above the possibility that adventure and security might be exemplified at *different times* of a given life, might

be exemplified *seriatim*, and one can ask whether this might not then allow for the possibility of a life of perfect happiness as far as these goods are concerned. Presumably and most plausibly, we are imagining a life in which a longer or shorter period of adventure is followed by a longer or shorter period of security, and of course such lives are a fairly familiar feature of the human landscape. But remember that we are assuming the importance of adventure as a human good; so we have to imagine that the earlier period of adventure, in the life we are talking about, was exhilarating, intense, fascinating, and fulfilling; and that a life of security won't or can't contain all these elements. In that case, the later period will be lacking in something valuable, and won't that then mean that it isn't *perfectly* wonderful (or even, perhaps, perfectly satisfactory) from the standpoint of happiness or well-being?

But, the reply might go, one may have had *enough* (of) adventure in one's earlier life and be more than happy to "retire" to a more secure and stable existence. Ask yourself, however, what the flavor of that "enough" actually, psychologically, is. Is the person who thinks this way merely reporting satiation, satiety, with respect to adventure in the way that someone who has eaten three slices of cake may stop being interested in cake and feel, in fact and for the moment, sated with (the experience of eating) cake? But the point about satiety or satiation is that it wears off, that one's appetite returns, so if the analogy with adventure is really to hold, we have to suppose that the person who has had enough adventure to want a life of (more) security will eventually look for adventure again—and be a bit dissatisfied if at that point the opportunity for it is denied him or simply impossible (given the choices he has already made). One doesn't yet have an example of perfect contentment and satisfaction in a life involving adventure and security *seriatim*.

But in speaking above of the person who feels they have had enough adventure in their life and who feels ready or more than ready for a life of real security, I asked the reader to consider what the psychological flavor of the enoughness might be. I suggested that it might just indicate satiety, and we found problems or a problem in using that interpretation of things to support the idea of perfect happiness serially containing adventure and security. But I actually think that the flavor of the enoughness is quite different from what I originally suggested. It seems to me that someone who expresses herself by saying that she has had enough adventure in her life and would like a little security is actually expressing a certain degree of revulsion with regard to her previous adventurous life. Adventure is scary and anxiety-inducing; and, as we know, it can *sometimes* to some degree be traumatic; and the feeling that one has had enough adventure (and a concomitant longing for safety and security) is most plausibly regarded as a sign of the negative features or factors that sometimes accompany or are part of adventure and adventurousness. But this then shows that in this instance the period of adventure wasn't entirely blissful and perfect (with respect to happiness or well-being) and helps support the idea that adventure and security are partial goods and that adventurousness and prudence are partial virtues—and that perfect virtue and perfect happiness are in principle impossible.

What also supports this is the thought that adventure, even if it induces anxiety, has many positive features that will be lacking in a life that combines adventure and security *seriatim* in a once-and-for-all way.<sup>10</sup> And if you try to vary the picture by imagining a *frequent alternation* between adventure and security, it doesn't really help matters much. If the alternation is (imagined to be) too frequent, then, and for a priori reasons, it doesn't make coherent psychological sense; and if it is infrequent, then every one of the

points made above holds *mutatis mutandis*, and we still have no case for the possibility of perfection.

Finally, there is another possibility we haven't yet considered. Someone might want to argue that even if a period of life in which adventure (or security) was absent isn't ideal from the standpoint of happiness, a total life combining such a period with one in which there was, say, great adventure (or security) would or could be a perfectly happy one. This, clearly, is to appeal to and make particular use of the doctrine of organic wholes, and, of course, similar moves are familiar from attempts at theodicy within theology or the philosophy of religion: for it is often said, for example, that we can't appreciate the good without experiencing the bad and one might interpret that to mean that what is bad (e.g., pain) in the small actually makes for a better, or sometimes even perfect, whole. Now I shall be talking of this specific issue of theodicy in our next chapter, where we shall see more about how it bears on questions about how to argue for the possibility or for the impossibility of perfection. But prescind from the analogy with theodicy, it does seem to me implausible to suppose, for example, that the anxiety/risk that characterizes a period of adventure and makes it less than an ideally happy period of life somehow doesn't affect the happiness of an overall life in the same basic direction. As I said, we shall discuss this kind of organicism further in the next chapter, but for the moment it doesn't seem plausible to hold that an adult life some of whose major periods or stages are less than perfectly happy can nonetheless be appropriately or plausibly characterized as being one that *on the whole* was perfectly or ideally happy.<sup>11</sup>

I would like to turn next to the somewhat different issue of the partial values/goods of career achievement and deep relationships with intimates. Here too one may think that there are possibilities for reconciling these goods and for showing them to be cotenable within an ideally happy life that I haven't considered—possibilities that

challenge or undercut at least some of the things I have been saying about partial goods and the impossibility of perfect happiness. And as with adventure vs. security, some of these possibilities might be imagined to obtain by positing a division or partition of career achievement and deep affiliative goods into different parts of a person's life. One might think, for example, that someone could choose a career that typically peaks early—say mathematics or theoretical physics—then leaving herself free in later less intellectually fecund years for all the intimacy and devotion that were absent during the years when she was making her mark as a mathematician or physicist.<sup>12</sup>

But what are we supposing here? Is it really thinkable that someone should develop a desire and need for intimacy after spending years, decades, without those attributes? Or, assuming that that doesn't make much sense, could we suppose, instead, that the person simply represses or suppresses that desire in the knowledge or belief that they have to do everything they can while they are still capable of their best possible work in their chosen field and that they will later be able to make up for the absence of affiliative goods in their earlier life *and do so in such a way that that earlier absence in no way detracted from the overall goodness of their life?*

Well, for one thing, if they later develop or give expression to their capacity for intimate relationships and really enjoy and gain a sense of fulfillment from those relationships, won't they regret what they missed out on in their earlier years? If they have a wonderful husband and children later on, won't they regret not having had such full and fulfilling relationships earlier on with, say, their grandparents, their parents, their siblings, their college roommate? And won't this reflect an actual loss, through their having focused on career goals, that the later relationships cannot fully undo. Perhaps the later relationships will help make up for what they missed out on earlier, but what makes up for something bad doesn't erase it or

make it somehow fail to count toward an intelligent reckoning of the value (for them) of their life overall. So unless one relies on the kind of organic view that I mentioned earlier, it seems hard to see how to make the case that such a person's life has been ideally happy on the whole. And if one does rely on the organic view and say that there is nothing (overall) regrettable about the fact that one didn't have good, close relations with one's family or friends or a partner/spouse during those early years, then one seems to be making light of—to be not taking really seriously—the loss one sustained through not having those relationships. Certainly, if one really loves those one later loves, one will not or may not spend time moping around and repining the early loss or absence. To do that would in fact derogate from the value and significance of the present relationships. But even if one doesn't spend time regretting the past, one might surely, if asked or pressed, acknowledge that one had missed out on something important. So I don't see how one could say that such a life was one of perfect or ideal happiness.

But there is another possibility, one not paralleled by anything said earlier about adventure vs. prudence. We can suppose that one's deep intimate relationships and one's career fulfillment are not segregated into different parts of one's life, but that they occur together—and that that is possible because achievements in one's chosen field come so easily to one that the energy and efforts that a career and career fulfillment normally demand of most of us are not necessary in one's own case. Think of Mozart, to whom musical invention seems to have come effortlessly and spontaneously. Couldn't a Mozart of physics or music have all the creative/career fulfillment any of us ever has while at the same time enjoying the deepest kind(s) of personal relationships? We could even imagine that this person cares much more about people and relationships than about their career, but that that doesn't in any way interfere with their creative/career success or fulfillment.

This doesn't, at first glance, seem particularly problematic (though in human terms it would have to be a rare phenomenon). But something is left out of this picture that in the end, I think, compromises the happiness, the fulfillment, of the person we are speaking hypothetically about. If someone is born with a talent and doesn't use it, we don't in the end envy them or think that the talent has really, ultimately, done them any good whatsoever. But Mozart, of course, made use of his talent and achieved great things, and let's not suppose that he didn't have to work hard to orchestrate his inspirations to completion in finished works of great art. Such hard work requires perseverance, strength of purpose, and so even a Mozart had to place great value on his career/artistic achievement/fulfillment. It's not easy to suppose that such a person cared much more about his relationships than about his artistic fulfillment. Now someone might say in response that we could in principle imagine a person who didn't have to work as hard and be as driven or committed as Mozart was in order to do or create important, fulfilling work: a super-Mozart, if you will. But this person, as we have now characterized him or her, does miss out on something very important in life, and let me try to explain what that is.

Most creative people—and perhaps this was true even of Mozart—have to *struggle* in order to create great work, achieve wonderful things; and though struggle may be painful or hard in various ways, the fact that one has, through struggle, overcome difficulties and obstacles to one's achieving things adds to the personal value, the personal good, one derives from such achievement. One naturally thinks that a fine achievement was worth all the turmoil, hard work, struggle, and even anguish that it took to make the achievement (finally) possible. Indeed, we tend to think that the hard work, struggle, etc., make the achievement *more* of an achievement and to that extent *more* of a life good. And if this thinking is granted any ethical weight, it tells against the view that a super-Mozart has an

ideally good life. Such a person hasn't "won through" to her accomplishments, to her fulfillment, and to that extent those fulfillments mean less, constitute less of a good thing for her, than achievements and fulfillment that *are* "hard won."<sup>13</sup> Once again, then, I believe there is no reason to think that it is really possible to combine fully creative career/artistic/scientific fulfillment and fully satisfying deep intimate relationships in a single totally happy life.<sup>14</sup>

Now I earlier mentioned the possibility that the best life most of us can lead may be one in which career involvement and personal intimacy are traded off against one another—a life in which one is only partly devoted to one's work and only partly involved in close relationships. Such a life *might*, for various reasons, be better than any life in which we were fully devoted to work and missed out in a big way on the goods of personal intimacy and any life in which we were totally involved with our intimate relationships and missed out in a big way on career fulfillment. But I am far from sure of this, and in any event I don't think we need to decide this particular question here. However, we would normally characterize such a life as involving a *compromise* between career/creative values and affiliative ones, and that very term, once again, suggests or even entails that such a life isn't *ideally* good or happy (even if it is on the whole reasonably *satisfactory*). I therefore think that the best objections I have been able to come up with don't unseat our earlier conclusions and leave us with the Berlin thesis not only intact but supported by the sheer difficulty of finding any plausible strong objection to it.

But another point needs to be made—and from the standpoint of relevancy to contemporary thinking and attitudes and their practical consequences, it may be the most significant point to be made in this book. Most people today who think about the matter think that the difficulty of balancing career and family—or, and more generally, career and relationships—is an artifact of the way social



life is currently organized and perhaps will continue to be organized even if patriarchal (and other benighted) institutions and attitudes eventually loosen their grip on us. (As I have said, even men nowadays find it difficult to choose between or balance career and deep involvement with their families.) But if the preceding is on the right track, then the difficulty of balancing is conceptually, metaphysically, inevitable. (To my knowledge, Berlin never spoke of this particular predicament, but I think he might well have agreed with what I have just said: it certainly illustrates and helps to support his general theses about the conceptual impossibility of perfection.)

Perhaps, then, instead of beating our heads against the wall of current social arrangements and blaming ourselves or others or society when we find that we cannot have everything we want in or from our careers and (family or other) relationships, we should recognize the strong inevitability of this predicament, the deep impossibility of our situation in relation to our values, desires, and aspirations.<sup>15</sup> This might actually make it easier to accept the difficulties and impossibilities we face with respect to career/creativity vs. relationships. I certainly hope that this is the case (and that the present book might make a difference here); but of course one can't be sure. Seeing things as deeply inevitable and unavoidable doesn't always lead one to accept them—is it so clear that atheism makes it easy or easier to accept the inevitability of one's future nonbeing? So, as I say, it is not clear to me that the "message" of the present book—or at least the particular message I am now focusing on—will or would do people any good. But in any event, if the message is valid, is true, that has philosophical implications which are worth considering independently of any practical applications, and that is perhaps the only conclusion that we have any right to reach on the basis of the arguments that have been given here.

And let me now, finally, generalize what I have been saying about the issue of career vs. family or, perhaps more accurately, point to a generalization of that issue that has already implicitly operated in our discussion. If our previous arguments are on the right track, then the “choice” between creative fulfillment/accomplishment and deep relationship(s) constitutes *at a deeper level* what is typically presented or described as the “choice” between career and family (or between career and relationships). After all, not everyone who accomplishes significant things has a career (did Emily Dickinson, Kierkegaard, or Proust have a career?); and one doesn’t have to literally have a family (think of some priests) in order to be involved in deep personal relationships. So I think the more superficial or “accidental” talk of career vs. family points us toward the more general or generalized choice between creative fulfillment/accomplishment and deep relationships and even toward the idea that ideal happiness is absolutely impossible, but it becomes easier to recognize and see the bases for that impossibility if one conceives things at the more general or less superficial and accidental level.

But now we have a new task. We have in this chapter discussed views that clearly contrast with those I have followed Isaiah Berlin in advancing. But there are other views and concepts that seem or might seem very much in line with, or in the spirit of, what Berlin has said about the impossibility of perfection. I am thinking, most particularly, of ideas about moral dilemma and moral cost that philosophers like Bernard Williams have defended. These ideas seem at first glance to fit well with and perhaps even to entail the impossibility of virtue-perfection, and I want to devote our next chapter mainly to discussing whether this appearance is or is not misleading. Does the possibility, if it is one, of moral dilemma or of moral cost (the latter in a sense to be defined in our next chapter) constitute another route to the impossibility of virtue-perfection beyond anything suggested in my own previous examples and arguments? Let us see.

## Perfection, Moral Dilemmas, and Moral Cost

Although he certainly was a brilliant and original ethical thinker in his own right, Bernard Williams was also in some measure a disciple of Isaiah Berlin. He was (I believe) Berlin's student, and Berlin did many things to advance his career. But, more importantly, some of his most important ideas in ethics develop Berlin's ideas in interesting and novel directions.

I am thinking here especially of what Williams has written on the subject of moral dilemmas, and also (though this has had less impact on the ethics literature) of Williams's notion of moral cost. Dilemmas in the now standard sense are situations where, through no moral fault of their own, agents cannot avoid acting wrongly, situations in which they cannot avoid violating some all-things-considered moral obligation; and Williams was one of the first philosophers to argue that such situations of dilemma not only are possible in principle but actually occur in our lives (or in situations described in literature). To be sure, many, many philosophers subsequently have argued that dilemmas as described by Williams and others are in fact impossible—they are said, for example, to entail the repudiation of certain basic deontic or moral principles that we have no reason to think we should repudiate. But I don't want to get into those debates here.<sup>1</sup> A virtue ethicist like myself may well have reason to agree with the critics, but for purposes of the present

discussion, I shall assume that dilemmas are possible, because I want to consider how that possibility bears or would bear on the thesis of the impossibility of perfection that Berlin first introduced and that we have been defending.

The thesis that moral cost is possible is less controversial, because it doesn't seem to violate certain basic metaethical (or deep ethical) assumptions in the way that the idea of moral dilemma does. Serious moral cost occurs when one is in a situation, through no fault of one's own, where doing what is right will involve *wronging someone*. And this is a stronger notion than the idea that there are situations where one permissibly violates a prima facie duty to someone, but owes an apology to that person after the fact. If I promise to meet you for lunch at noon but am waylaid by an emergency situation in which I have to save a child from drowning, so that I end up late for our appointment, I have done nothing wrong, have acted permissibly, but I still do owe you an apology (and it will be wrong if I don't apologize). But if I do apologize, I can't really be said to have wronged you, whereas this is precisely what can be said in certain situations where I incur a moral cost by acting in a certain way.

For example, during World War II, Winston Churchill was told by the British intelligence services that they had decoded a transmission from Germany indicating that the Germans were about to launch an aerial attack on the town of Coventry. He decided not to warn Coventry because he judged that the value to the Allied war effort of the Germans' not knowing that their code had been broken outweighed the human cost of allowing Coventry to be bombed. And we may think he was right about this, so that we regard Churchill as not having acted wrongly in failing to alert the citizens of Coventry and allowing many to die who wouldn't have died if that city *had* been alerted. Still, Churchill did something morally very distasteful,

and he or the government he headed can, not implausibly, be said to have wronged the citizens of Coventry.<sup>2</sup> They will then be owed more than an apology, and more even, perhaps, than monetary reparations (how does one really make reparations for lost lives?). Cases of moral cost are not moral dilemmas because they don't involve anyone in having to act immorally, but they are direr, morally, than situations in which one merely owes an apology. They lie in a moral area between these two kinds of cases, and I believe Williams was the first person to bring such cases to our notice.<sup>3</sup> They involve the idea that one can wrong *someone* without having acted (overall) wrongly, and this is certainly a very, very interesting moral concept (though, as I said, it has been largely neglected in recent ethics). And in the present chapter, in addition to relating moral dilemma to what we have been saying about perfection, or the necessity of imperfection, I want to consider how the idea of moral cost also bears on that issue. In particular, I want to show you that the sheer ideas of moral dilemma and moral cost don't in fact point toward the impossibility of virtue-perfection (much less toward the idea of necessary imperfection in regard to happiness or living well).

This may be somewhat surprising—especially in the light of Williams's strong intellectual relationship to Berlin's ethical thought. Like Berlin, Williams is very much a pluralist. But more significantly, the idea of moral dilemma in particular seems to partake of much the same structure as that of the necessity of virtue-imperfection. Berlin's thesis holds that there is a certain inconsistency among (what are properly conceived of as) the virtues, and the idea of moral dilemmas entails that there can be an inconsistency among our all-things-considered obligations. So one might well expect that (the existence of) moral dilemmas would count as a confirming instance of Berlin's thesis of necessary virtue-imperfection; that the

existence of dilemmas would help to show that Berlin's thesis is correct—in which case the brilliant student or disciple would have provided new and additional resources as support for what the teacher had claimed. But to my knowledge Williams never said as much, never said that moral dilemmas support the impossibility of perfect virtue (of perfection with respect to the virtues), and as I shall argue in what follows, Williams was probably right not to do so. Facts or assumptions about moral dilemma and/or moral cost don't seem to support Berlin's original contention, and if that is so, then we were right to use our previous arguments to support it, rather than relying on anything to do with dilemma or cost considered as such. The cases mentioned in previous chapters, especially the case of frankness vs. tact, may well illustrate the idea of moral cost, for example, but, I shall argue, there can be moral cost and dilemma that don't bring necessary imperfection in their train; so with respect to those previous cases it isn't the fact that they may involve moral cost (or even dilemma) that is relevant to supporting Berlin's thesis, but other facts about them that we mentioned in our previous discussions—facts, most especially, having to do with partial values or partiality of values. But all of this needs to be shown. Let us begin by focusing on moral dilemmas.

Perhaps the purest and most convincing (putative) example of moral dilemma that can be found in literature occurs not in Greek tragedy, but in the more recent book *Sophie's Choice* by William Styron.<sup>4</sup> A Nazi official makes Sophie choose which of her two children is to be sent to a concentration camp, and she is told that if she refuses to choose, both will be sent. Eventually, Sophie commits suicide over what she has done—in choosing to send her daughter rather than her son. And, as I have indicated, I don't so much want to consider whether this was indeed a moral (or ethical) dilemma, but rather to ask how such a (putative) tragic choice (or others like

it) bears on the issue of inevitable or necessary ethical imperfection. (Also, Sophie seems to have had some sexist reasons for “preferring” her son, but let us as best we can remove them from the example—they are hardly inevitable elements in such a forced choice.)

The bearing of such examples on the issue of necessary imperfection concerns the attitude or disposition that (I think we can assume) Sophie inevitably displays in choosing one of her children over the other. In so choosing, she shows herself to be disposed to choose one or the other of them rather than let both be sent to concentration camps, and we must ask whether there is anything ethically criticizable in such a disposition. And my brief answer is that there isn’t. Some philosophers have maintained that in making any choice between her children, Sophie shows herself to be willing to “cooperate with evil.” Were she to refuse to choose, the choice to send both children to concentration camps (or to one camp) would be entirely the choice of the perverse Nazi who set up the dilemma she was confronted with, and some have concluded that that is or would have been the better choice to make—the refusal to cooperate with evil—rather than to choose or pick one of them for hardship and likely extermination. But I hope you don’t agree with this. Most people who see her as facing a dilemma see her situation as dilemmatic precisely because she can’t in all conscience refuse to cooperate with evil in a case like this, and I shall assume as much in what follows.

In that case, then, can we, should we, say that she manifests an ethically criticizable disposition in being willing to choose one of them for the camps? I am inclined not to think so. But I am not entirely sure about this because those who say it is never right to cooperate with evil could claim that an antecedent willingness to cooperate with evil is always ethically criticizable—and presumably such people would want to say that a willingness to enter into a nuclear test-ban treaty with a genuinely “evil empire” would also

manifest an ethically criticizable disposition on the part of any nation that was willing to do such a thing. However, this strikes me and perhaps it will strike others as extreme, and so I believe that there is nothing about Sophie's somewhat similar disposition to criticize in ethical terms. In other words, I am saying that if someone, in advance of being in a situation like Sophie's, has the disposition to choose one or the other of her/his children for hardship and possible extermination rather than let them both be sent to the death camps, given that she or he is ever in a situation like Sophie's—and I think this is a disposition most of us have—we wouldn't be inclined to call that an ethical failing or imperfection. (Of course, I am assuming here that the disposition in question isn't a disposition in favor of a *particular one* of one's children, and is, quite simply, the disposition to choose *one or the other* of them for hardship and possible extermination. How one on that basis would actually decide which child to choose is a complicated issue, but not one we need to discuss further here.)

What we are saying about the Sophie case stands in subtle but definite contrast, I think, with what most of us would want to say about the example mentioned in Chapter 1 of the person who has to be either tactful or frank with a friend who is masochistic in relationships but can't (we assumed) face that fact about himself. In that kind of case, and as I said earlier, if the person has the disposition to be frank and tell the truth, we think they are not as sensitive and kind as they ideally ought to be. And if they are disposed, instead, to be tactful, even when their friend is begging them to be frank, there is also something ethically regrettable in their attitude (and dispositions toward) their friend. In some sense they will be seen as falling short of our ideal of true friendship, of being a true and genuine friend; and, in fact, this can be plausibly said whatever they are inclined to do and actually do.



So I think our earlier type of example (and the notion of a partial virtue or value that we used to clarify or explain it) offers a stronger case for the inevitability of ethical imperfection than anything that derives from the sheer/mere supposition of the possibility or actuality of moral dilemmas. Even if the example of the friend is a case of moral dilemma (and I am not saying either that it is or that it isn't), it is not the fact of dilemmatic status as such that yields the inevitability of imperfection, but rather the aspects of that case that were focused on in earlier chapters.

Something similar, I believe, can be said about moral cost. If a political leader is willing and has the disposition not to warn some city or town of impending aerial bombing *given that a huge war effort (in a just war in which the future of humanity seems largely at stake) requires that one not alert the town*, I don't believe we are inclined to think that there is or must be something ethically regrettable or unsavory about that leader in virtue (excuse me!) of the fact that they possess such a disposition. And, once again, this contrasts with what we are inclined to think and say about the example of frankness vs. tact(fulness). So the sheer fact of serious moral cost (and even of the *inevitability*, as perhaps in the present case, of *either* moral cost *or* wrongdoing) doesn't entail the impossibility of virtue-perfection.

On the other hand, the case of the friend, even if it doesn't involve a moral dilemma, arguably does involve moral cost. If one is frank, one (knows in advance that one) is going to hurt one's friend a great deal (at a point where he needs or craves your support and reassurance); and if one is tactful, one knowingly refuses to tell a friend the truth when that is precisely (at least *de dicto*) what he is begging one to do. But the most we can conclude from this (and I am not sure, on the basis of our one example, that we should accept such a conclusion) is that the necessity of virtue-imperfection may

or does entail the possibility or inevitability of moral cost. The reverse implication, as we have seen, simply doesn't hold.<sup>5</sup> If a case is to support the idea of inevitable ethical imperfection, it has to involve something more than or different from moral dilemma or cost, and I have argued that that (or one such) more or different something is most clearly described in terms of the notion of a partial virtue.

But let us now consider another possibility. Public and private concerns and commitments are sometimes in tension, and perhaps in that signally important area of moral choice and possible conflict, we can find examples or an example that supports the idea of necessary ethical imperfection without leaning on the ideas of partial virtue and partial value that we have discussed earlier.

Let me begin with an example that I discussed years ago in the book *Goods and Virtues*. Imagine a public official living in Italy during the period of the "Brigate Rosse" and their attacks on the state or its government. Imagine further that his son has committed murder under the auspices of the Brigades and that, further, he has killed someone who is entirely innocent and in any event did not deserve to be killed. Given his position of power, the father is in a position to spirit his son out of the country and in fact chooses to do so.

Now in *Goods and Virtues* I argued that this may well be an example of justified immorality. It would count as immorality because (let us assume) the state is just enough and the son's deed heinous enough so that it would be wrong, morally wrong, for the official to use his powers to help his son evade Italian justice. (It might not be wrong of him simply not to *tell* authorities of his son's whereabouts, but that is another matter.) On the other hand, given his relationship with and love for his son, it wouldn't necessarily be irrational for the father to do what he does. What he has most reason to do might in such a case run counter to morality.<sup>6</sup> And I hasten to

mention that this conclusion, however plausible it may seem with regard to the case just described, goes against the familiar and wide-accepted “overridingness thesis” that claims that moral reasons, and especially the fact of acknowledged moral wrongness, override in rational terms (in terms of good reasons for action) any other reasons or rational considerations that may favor doing what is immoral.

Now some philosophers, some ethicists, will want to invoke the overridingness thesis precisely to counter what I have said about the case of the Italian father. But if we allow the case to be described in the way I described it above, that will make it easier (if it is possible at all) to argue against what I have been saying and want to say here, namely, that it is only the kinds of examples I discussed in earlier chapters that support the Berlin thesis about the impossibility of perfection. So let us assume that the father in our example acts in a justified but immoral way. (After all, the case isn’t like weakness of will because the father may well be willing to *stand by* what he has done long after he does it, and in cases of weak will, the weak-willed person typically shows regret for what he or she has done after the fact.) Our assumptions here make things more difficult, not less difficult, for the thesis I want to maintain, so let us continue to make them.<sup>7</sup>

We have to consider, then, whether, in the light of those assumptions, ethical imperfection is inevitable with respect to cases like that of the Italian father. And my thought is that it isn’t inevitable because if the father had been unwilling to spirit his son out of the country, there would have been nothing ethically criticizable in that disposition or tendency. Now if the father hadn’t been willing to break the law for the sake of his son, he might have shown himself to love his son less than he might. A father willing to break the law for his son may evidence or embody a greater love for his son than a

father whose love was limited by such moral considerations.<sup>8</sup> But that doesn't necessarily show that this latter kind of father is ethically criticizable, deficient, or suspect. Love is a great and wonderful thing, and there are moral and ethical imperatives and ideals that form an important part of our conception of real or true or great love. But we don't think there is anything suspect in there being limitations to a given love. If one loves both one's children equally, then one may love each of them less than one would have loved a given one of them, if one had had an incredibly strong attachment to that one and a lesser, merely affectionate relation to the other. But no one thinks that is a reason for holding a father who loves both his children equally, and less than he might have loved a particular one of them, to be ethically deficient or suspect.

Similarly, the fact that a father is unwilling to do a grave injustice in order to save a delinquent or criminal son from just punishment doesn't show him to be ethically deficient, even if it *may* show him to lack the greatest possible love for that son.<sup>9</sup>

And the same point can be made with less philosophical controversial examples. If I give money to Oxfam rather than spending it to give my daughter private German lessons that she is very interested in having, then perhaps I show myself to love her (dote on her) less than if I forgot about Oxfam and its mission. But if these are the only two choices I have, the presumed lesser love for the daughter doesn't seem to imply or indicate any ethical failing on my part. Sometimes the larger or more important needs of distant others can take precedence over interests and desires closer to (or at) home without there being anything ethically regrettable or criticizable about this ethical preference.

Once again, then, we haven't identified any really plausible route to Berlin's ideas other than the one that goes through the idea of partiality and the sorts of examples we have used to move us in that

direction. The thesis of necessary imperfection grows in a very special soil, and issues of moral dilemma, of moral cost, and also of justifiable immorality largely bypass that terrain. This may be surprising, and when I first thought of the examples we used earlier, I imagined that Berlin's thesis would receive further support from our understanding of moral dilemma and the like. But that didn't, that doesn't, turn out to be the case.

However, I do want finally to mention a way of arguing for the impossibility of perfect *happiness* or *well-being* that doesn't bring in—or doesn't seem to bring in—the idea of partial goods or values. It has sometimes been said that what is bad can help us to appreciate what is good, so that, in fact, a world without pain would inevitably be a less happy place than certain possible worlds where pain was present. Such views are often part of theodicy, part of an attempt to show that despite the fact of pain and hardship our world may be the best of all possible worlds—in which case God's existence and goodness may not be impugned or undercut by the pain and hardships that clearly do exist in the world.

But if the greatest possible human happiness depends on there being pain and suffering, how does that show that our happiness is necessarily imperfect or incomplete, or that a perfectly good or happy life is impossible? Couldn't one claim, rather, that the existence of pain, say, in a given life is necessary to that life's greatest happiness and might help ensure that that life was perfect in happiness. To be sure, pain considered in itself is a bad thing; but we all know the doctrine of organic wholes according to which something that is bad out of context or in one context may count as or contribute to good in another. So one might say that the pain we experience isn't at all a bad thing in the context of a sufficiently pleasurable overall life (I am simplifying in order to make a point); and one might go on to claim that such a life would or could in fact (if one

were ever so lucky) be *perfectly* happy. In that case, it wouldn't be at all clear that this kind of theodicy will entail the impossibility of perfect happiness; rather, it would seem to show us that and how perfect happiness *is* possible.

But we, and the person arguing in the manner just mentioned, are forgetting a lesson from chapter 2. We saw there that there is a difference between something being as good as possible and something being perfect, for if imperfection is necessary and inevitable, what might count as the best possible might invariably *not be perfect*. In that case, the sheer fact that a life is as good as possible doesn't entail that it is perfectly good, and the assumption that pain is necessary to the best and highest possible appreciation and enjoyment of the good doesn't show that pain is compatible with a *perfectly* happy or good life. The best possible may simply not be, may inevitably not be, perfect.

So if pain is necessary to the best possible life but inevitably to some degree mars such a life and makes it count as less than perfectly good, then the above theodicy would actually tend to show that the world can't be perfect at least with regard to happiness. (This would represent a serious but metaphysically inevitable limitation on God's powers.) However, above we mentioned the doctrine of organic unities, and according to such a doctrine, as relevantly applied in the present case, pain doesn't or needn't at all mar a life or its happiness. And I agree that if one accepts this application of the just-mentioned doctrine, then pain cannot be used to argue for the inevitability of less than perfect happiness.

But is it really plausible to say that the pain that is presumed to help us to appreciate life better than we otherwise could is in no way a bad thing in the context of that life, that it in no way or to no degree mars that life with respect to its happiness? This doesn't seem at all plausible to me, and if we reject the idea, then we are indeed faced

with an argument for the impossibility of perfect happiness that in no way borrows from what we have been saying about partial values. Substantial pain may be necessary to the best *possible* life, but since it also arguably mars that life's happiness, the life, whatever else may happen in it, cannot be perfect with respect to happiness. And that is the thesis we have earlier argued for in other ways.

But is it really true that one cannot appreciate the good (things in life) without having one's share of bad things happen to one? I for one am somewhat skeptical about this. I don't see that someone has to have experienced pain in order to enjoy the pleasures of a good meal or a good swim or a good concert or a good conversation.<sup>10</sup> Certainly, if we never experienced pain, we might be unable to empathize with the pain that others feel and (for empirical reasons) our moral capacities might never fully develop. But I think we should be able to leave this particular issue aside in the present context and just consider how plausible it is to say that someone has to experience pain in order to (otherwise) enjoy life. This doesn't seem all that plausible, but that doesn't necessarily exhaust the issues that are relevant here. Enjoying life is one thing, but having an overall good life is or may be something different and larger, and our discussion of the partial good of achievement in chapter 3 argued (in a way obviously influenced by Romantic thought) that the good of a life's achievement or accomplishment is diminished if it all comes too easily, that struggle is essential to the overall life-goodness of great or fine achievements. But there is surely something less than perfectly happy about a life that involves struggle, so if certain goods are necessary to an ideal life but require struggle, that in itself constitutes an argument against the possibility of perfect happiness.

However, even if this dialectic is persuasive—and it tends to persuade me—it doesn't undercut what I want to say about the role the idea of partial values plays, and I think must play, in understanding

and explaining the necessity of imperfection. If perfect happiness is impossible because the full good of accomplishing something important or significant depends on a certain amount of struggle, we are still talking about what is only a partial good, of something that precludes the fullest value of deep, intimate, personal relationship(s) in an ethically regrettable way. So the idea of partial value is built into the picture of what is inevitably less than perfect about a life in which achievement occurs at the cost of struggle, because that achievement occurs at some cost to personal relationship as well.<sup>11</sup> Thus in a perhaps surprising way, the old theodicean claim that (fully appreciating) the good requires (experiencing) the bad lends support to the Berlinian idea of the necessity of imperfection and to our attempt here to explain and justify that idea by reference to the concept of partial values.<sup>12</sup>



## Connections with Care Ethics and Romanticism

The present project didn't begin with Isaiah Berlin and the thesis of the impossibility of perfection. It's true that for many years the example or idea of frankness vs. tact had rolled around in my mind and that I had thought it might indicate that perfection at least of the virtues was impossible. But I believe I was at best only dimly aware, through those years, of what Berlin had claimed; and to the extent I was aware of it, I didn't see that Berlin had any better arguments for the impossibility of perfection than I did. And I had precious little: as I say, I had the idea of tact vs. frankness and hopes and suspicions about it, but nothing more.

If the reader won't mind a little personal intellectual history, what finally got me to the point of wanting to argue for the imperfection thesis and of having some actual arguments for that thesis was a consideration of issues having to do with feminism and patriarchy. I had noticed the seemingly gendered character of certain objective list theories of human goods: of the lists themselves and of particular items on the list. I saw that according to patriarchy certain things were good only for (or relative to) men and certain others only for (or relative to) women, and I realized that a more enlightened, feminist view of these matters would recognize a certain clash between the goods, or the virtues, in question, but wouldn't regard them as gender-relative in the traditional fashion. All this *reminded*

me of the clash or possible inconsistency between tact and frankness that had preoccupied me for so long, and the fact that I now had so many examples of paired but opposed goods or virtues led me to push the issue of frankness vs. tact much harder than I had previously. I then came up with a specific example of how these traits can clash that seemed to show (as Isaiah Berlin had held) that ethical perfection is impossible, and this led me to the explicit idea of partial virtues, goods, values. It then was relatively easy to apply this thinking to the paired and opposed goods and virtues that patriarchy relativizes to gender, and I was off and running (in some directions Berlin had never spoken about).

Of course, this sequence of events is recorded in chapter 1 in a more philosophically objective or argumentational fashion. But chapter 1 also noted that those academic feminists who had spoken of or argued about gender differences in how people approach moral issues hadn't really spoken of values outside of morality narrowly conceived. So as I was developing the ideas of chapter 1, I was implicitly comparing and contrasting what I was coming up with and what I was doing with what (other) feminists had said about specifically moral issues of right and wrong, moral goodness and moral badness (or blameworthiness). I mentioned some of this in chapter 1, but having now more fully stated what I want to say about the impossibility of perfection and its relevance to feminist ideas or values, I also want to say more about how what I have been doing relates to feminist, and especially care-ethical, views of morality. There seems in fact to be a tension between the two, and since I am a committed care ethicist, I think I need to say more about how what I have been arguing in the present book relates to, and is not really in tension with, what I have said about care ethics in two previous books: *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* and *Moral Sentimentalism*.<sup>1</sup>

Let me first describe the seeming tension. Care ethics originated with Carol Gilligan's 1982 book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*.<sup>2</sup> The different voices she spoke of were a voice of caring and a voice of justice, and at least initially she associated those two moral voices, respectively, with women and with men—though she maintained from the beginning that the significance of (the difference between) the voices transcended any issues of sex or gender. According to Gilligan and most subsequent care ethicists, those two voices constituted two different ways of approaching moral issues or problems. The care voice sees such issues in terms of caring for and direct connection to or with other people; the justice voice approaches moral questions in terms of justice, rights, individual autonomy, and a reliance on (citing and applying) principles or rules in making moral decisions. And when I first explored the questions I dealt with in chapter 1, I realized or at least thought that the idea of different voices could also be applied outside the specific realm of morality to questions about human good or well-being and to questions about virtues that were not specifically moral. This is something that no one had previously pursued in any kind of scholarly way, but it seemed clear that just as caring might be traditionally associated with women's treatment of moral questions, the personal good of security (to choose just one example) was traditionally associated with women more than with men. And just as justice might be more traditionally associated with male or masculine approaches to morality, so too was the personal good of adventure more traditionally associated with men than with women. So, as I have indicated, I initially believed I had unearthed a difference of voice(s) outside the area of morality that corresponded at least roughly with the difference of voice(s) that care ethicists had argued for in and for the realm of morality.

But there also seemed to be a clear difference between the inferences care ethics had drawn about the voices and what I was prepared

to say about the application of that notion to extramoral, but ethical questions about human good(s) and virtues. Care ethics treated one of the voices, the voice of care or caring, as determinative of how one should ultimately and validly think about morality; and this tendency was clearly visible in the work of the first person to write specifically about what an ethics of care could or should be. Nel Noddings's *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* focused on caring and how it would or could operate in moral contexts and pretty much ignored (except to criticize) supposedly masculine ways of dealing with moral issues.<sup>3</sup> And by and large care ethics, as it has developed in recent decades, has tended to stress the voice of caring over the voice of justice.

By contrast, the approach taken in the present chapter 1 stressed the importance and validity of both voices with respect to issues of human good and virtue. It rejected the idea that certain goods are relative to gender, and it argued, for example, that both security and adventure are equally valid (partial goods) for both genders. To that extent what I have done here is gender-neutral in a way that care ethics doesn't seem to be, and one can wonder, therefore, whether the approach taken here really fits in with or can accommodate care ethics as a view of the moral. The answer to this question, this problem, is that ultimately the two approaches are compatible and much less different with respect to issues of gender or gender-neutrality than might appear. I say "ultimately" because I think the approach we have taken and the conclusions drawn in chapter 1, above, do require us to rethink care ethics to a certain extent. But once we have done so—and in a moment I shall explain how and why I think we can and ought to do so—I believe that care ethics and the ideas of the present book will really not be in any tension. There will be differences of *implementation* as regards the issue of gender neutrality (or balance), but neither care ethics nor the

present view of the virtues and personal good/well-being needs to be biased in favor of one gender or the other, even if the ways in which they achieve such neutrality will—I think interestingly—be somewhat different. But all of this will require a good deal of explanation.

I think some of the things I said in chapter 1 should lead us to object to certain familiar, but ultimately inessential, features of care ethics. Both Nel Noddings and Virginia Held, another very prominent care ethicist, have treated care ethics as involving not only a direct (principle-unmediated) concern for the welfare of others, but also a general desire to promote, maintain, and enhance caring relationships.<sup>4</sup> And I have no objection to such a view or approach *as far as it goes*. But the question can arise why caring relationships are stressed to the exclusion of other good things in human life.

In chapter 1, I argued that deep (caring) relationships and individual creative/career achievement and fulfillment are complementary partial goods, but a care ethics that stresses the relationships but not such things as individual achievement and self-fulfillment effectively treats these latter as less important goods than the relationships, and as I mentioned earlier, that smacks of patriarchy and the values it assigns predominantly to women. If you remember, patriarchy treats intense close relationships as more important for women than for men, treats them, in effect, as gender-relative goods *for women*, and I think and said that it is objectionable from a feminist standpoint to treat relationships in this way. And it is also objectionable from that standpoint to stint on the value assigned to career goals: rather, such goals should be and are validly seen as important for both men and women and as comparable in their overall importance to traditionally conceived feminine goods like close personal relationships. But this is precisely what the kind of care ethics that

stresses (the promotion, maintenance, and enhancement of) relationships and says nothing similar about career fulfillment implicitly denies, and I think this aspect of previous care ethics is therefore quite objectionable.<sup>5</sup>

Care ethics has previously come in for a great deal of criticism not only from traditionally minded moral philosophers, but from feminists. Previous objections have included the claim that care ethics, in retrograde fashion, encourages women to keep doing most of the caring (for others) that is done in society and leaves us with no way to criticize such a state of affairs. They have also included the claim that care ethics can't handle issues of autonomy and justice that any systematic or complete and contemporaneously relevant approach to ethics needs to be able to deal with. But previous work of my own and of others has addressed these criticisms and, I believe, has done so pretty effectively.<sup>6</sup> So I don't propose to dwell on those criticisms of care ethics at any length here. However, the criticism I have just myself made of care ethics is at least somewhat different from these others, and rather than attempt to rebut it, I think we should instead attempt to incorporate it into care ethics: that is, change care ethics so that it no longer is open to the criticism. More particularly, if care ethics, as it has often been articulated, tells us we should be concerned about promoting, maintaining, and enhancing relationships and doesn't limit this to relationships that we ourselves are or will be involved in, it should also tell us to be concerned with *generally* promoting, maintaining, and enhancing the fulfillment of individual careers and vocations.<sup>7</sup>

Now care ethicists might object at this point that they have never said that individual self-fulfillment is unimportant, and this is, strictly speaking, probably correct. But to set the enhancement and preservation of relationships as an explicit general goal and *not to do the same* for individual career/creative fulfillment or accomplishment is

at the very least implicitly to downplay the importance of such fulfillment or accomplishment, and I think care ethics should stop doing that. Of course, the care ethicist might once more object on the grounds that care ethics is supposed to be a feminine ethics, that it is supposed to stress and articulate the (traditionally) feminine side of morality. But if care ethicists move in that direction, then they are granting that their views are one-sided and in need of supplementation. And indeed many care ethicists have said that care ethics needs to be supplemented by justice ethics in order to represent a complete normative conception of morality. But when care ethicists have said this, they have meant that there are *moral issues* (especially regarding politics and society) that care ethics cannot treat on its own, and my point here, then, is that *what care ethics says and understands about (the promotion, etc., of) human good is also in need of supplementation*. When the care ethicist says, e.g., that we should seek to enhance our own and others' relationships and doesn't say we should enhance both our own and others' individual fulfillment, s/he stresses what is traditionally, or in patriarchal terms, viewed as a good thing for women—and does so at the expense of what is traditionally viewed as a good thing for men.<sup>8</sup> So it is not just with respect to moral questions, but also with respect to questions about human good (and about nonmoral virtues) that care ethics needs to be supplemented. And this last point is one that care ethicists haven't, I think, been aware of.<sup>9</sup>

My own preference, and I think this makes the most sense in philosophical terms, is to develop care ethics in a way that *doesn't* require supplementation by some different, putatively masculine way of thinking about morality. This means showing the relevance of care ethics to issues of justice and autonomy, something my own work and, more recently, Noddings's, have sought to accomplish.<sup>10</sup> But—and this is the main point here—it also means emphasizing

*both* relationships *and* career fulfillment in spelling out the moral aims or goals of caring.<sup>11</sup> And in order to do that, we as care ethicists have to put an end to the exclusive emphasis on the goal of maintaining or developing caring relationships that has been so characteristic of previous care ethics.

A related point also needs to be made. There has been much criticism in recent decades of (Kantian) liberalism's atomistic view of individuals, of people, and not only care ethicists, but communitarians and many others have joined in this chorus of criticism.<sup>12</sup> What care ethicists and communitarians have wanted to replace the atomism with is a conception of individuals that treats their relations to or with others as at least partly constitutive of their identity, of who they are, and one finds such a relation-emphasizing view of personal identity, for example, in the work of Nel Noddings and Virginia Held that I have previously cited.

But doesn't this privilege our relationships with others over, say, our connection(s) with our own career/creative aspirations and achievements in a way that the discussion of chapter 1 should warn us against? If individual self-fulfillment is just as much a partial good as deep personal connection with other people, shouldn't we expect each to play a fairly equal role in constituting our personal identity? The care ethicist or communitarian who stresses the importance of relationships to individual identity and says nothing analogous about an individual's (relation to their own) creative aspirations and fulfillment (again) stresses a good that is traditionally associated with women more than men over another good that is more associated with men, and it seems to me that, at least from a feminist standpoint and with an eye to the broadest and more objective view of what counts in a human life, we should be stressing the importance of both relationships and career choices to constituting identity.<sup>13</sup> In other words, if atomism is wrong, then we shouldn't make



up for its metaphysical/ethical faults in a way that favors traditional female values over male ones, but should recognize that both sets of values have their importance and validity. If we tie the metaphysics, so to speak, of individual identity to certain ethical values, we should do so in a way that is even-handed with respect to gender issues or gender assumptions, and I think this point can be made not only on an abstract level, but more concretely.

There may be some, or many, individuals whose relationships are the most important thing about them, the thing from which they get their principal joys and disappointments, and for such individuals relationships may be more individuating (though what a paradoxical way to put it!) than anything they seek or achieve in any career they may have. But other people are different. Think, for example, of the antisocial Beethoven. Do we really want to say that his identity was constituted by his (arguably rather poor) relations with others? Doesn't it make more sense to see his identity as deeply entangled with his artistic aspirations, efforts, struggles, and accomplishments? And may there not be others whose personhood is more *equally* entangled with career issues and relationship issues? So if the care ethicist or communitarian insists that liberalism gives us an unrealistic or impoverished picture of personal identity and its conditions, then I think they had better be more gender-neutral and take in more kinds of factors than they have previously done. And in what follows I shall assume that care ethics is or has been adjusted in the ways I have been suggesting.

Nonetheless, there remain differences between care ethics and the Berlin-like view of goods and virtues adopted and defended here, and those differences might still worry us—make us think the two sets of views don't fit well with one another and make us think, therefore, that if the ideas defended earlier are valid, care ethics has to be abandoned—or *vice versa*. After all, I have just criticized

previous care ethics' views about personal identity and the goals of caring on the grounds of their being biased in favor of values traditionally associated with women (that is, traditionally thought of as more relevant to women than to men). And one can summarize this criticism by saying that, for the reasons and in the ways we have just been describing, previous care ethics seems (almost) as prejudiced against men as patriarchy and its values seem prejudiced against women.

But can't the same thing be said about the core concepts of care ethics, about its basic approach, independently of the assumptions we have just criticized and claimed to be inessential to care ethics? Isn't it, by contrast, absolutely essential to care ethics that it privilege care or caring over justice promulgated or instantiated in accordance with moral rules or principles, and isn't justice traditionally associated with men and caring more typically associated with women? How, in the light of that basic and irrecusable fact, can care ethics escape the charge of (a certain kind of) gender bias, of a preference for things female or feminine over things male or masculine? The approach taken in the present book clearly (I hope) doesn't arouse such worries or suspicions, so we can put the issue that needs to be faced in the following terms. How can someone who has pushed, as I have here, for a gender-neutral approach to the virtues and the good things in life accept a care-ethical approach to morality proper (i.e., narrowly conceived) that seems to grant so little value and validity to things (traditionally associated with the) male?

Well, I think the answer, in a nutshell, is that care ethics places more value on supposedly or traditionally male or masculine values than might appear, so that even if it is neutral or even-handed about gender in a somewhat different way from the way in which the approach of the present book is, the two are more congruent, less out of sorts, than the criticisms aired above would have us believe.

For one thing, many care ethicists hold that care ethics can't completely cover the realm of morality and that it needs to be supplemented by or to supplement some form of "justice ethics" in order to do justice (excuse the expression) to moral phenomena generally. Such care ethicists sometimes say that the care ethics part of what should eventually be an integrated whole is the more important part, but I have heard others say that neither part of the eventual integrated whole has any moral precedence over the other—with the significance of care ethics then being that it emphasizes an area of our overall morality that has been given short shrift within traditional philosophical/ethical theory and theorizing.

This would be a fairly easy way to show that and how care ethics fits with the gender-neutral arguments and conclusions of the present book, but it also would come at a price: the price being the admission or assumption that care ethics can't cover the whole waterfront of morality and needs to look to justice ethics to deal with issues of autonomy, rights, and, of course, justice. And the further assumption here is that care ethics and justice ethics *can*, in fact, be integrated and/or harmonized. This is an assumption that many prominent care ethicists and others (including myself at one time) have been willing to make, but it is also an assumption that I (now) believe to be deeply mistaken. Care ethicists say that their approach stresses human connection rather than separateness and claim that the justice approach or "voice" stresses separateness (e.g., autonomy rights as against others) at the expense of connection to or with others. But is it really to be supposed that two such opposing or contrary approaches would never conflict about important moral issues? This doesn't in fact make much sense, and my recent book *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* sought precisely (this was the principal *raison d'être* of the book) to show that an emphasis on connection of the sort characteristic of care ethics and an emphasis

on separateness (and autonomy rights) yield different and incompatible conclusions about certain highly important moral issues.

I argued there that with respect to “Skokie-type” examples of potential hate speech, the Kantian/liberal ethicist of justice will insist on the autonomy rights of those who wanted to demonstrate and make neo-Nazi speeches in a town where numerous Holocaust-survivors were living, whereas a care ethics that emphasizes our empathic concern for and connection to others will place much more weight on the potential damage to—and retraumatizing effects on—the Holocaust survivors that the neo-Nazi presence and activities were likely to cause. This is something that the neo-Nazis who wanted to march in Skokie were presumably well aware of—why else choose that particular town? But, as I pointed out in my book (drawing on previous work by Susan Brison), the liberals who have discussed this issue ignore those grievous effects, and I believe that makes them take a different position regarding what should or should not have been allowed in Skokie (the march never occurred) from what the care ethicist would advocate. For the care ethicist, serious potential human damage can trump or outweigh rights of autonomy—that is precisely what it means to treat connection with others as more important, ethically, than our separateness from or autonomy rights against others.

So in this case and in fact in many others, care ethics and justice ethics disagree;<sup>14</sup> and the idea, therefore, that they can be integrated or harmonized doesn’t really make sense. Justice ethics has taken on moral issues at every level—individual, social, legal, political, international—and since care ethics can’t be integrated with that approach or rely on it for answers to questions about legal/political morality, it has to stand on its own with respect to such questions; and in recent years more and more care ethicists have realized this. Care ethicists like Nel Noddings, Daniel Engster, and myself have

realized that in order to represent a genuine alternative to justice ethics, to Kantian liberalism, care ethics needs to offer its own account of justice—and we have provided or begun to provide accounts of that concept and (at least in my own case) of relevant other notions like autonomy and respect.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, let us ask ourselves whether what has been said, so gender-neutrally, in the present book fits comfortably with a care ethics that takes on moral issues across-the-board, the kind of care ethics I myself strongly favor. Such care ethics treats caring as basic not only to issues of personal or family morality, but to larger questions of social, and even international, justice, and doesn't our previous objection resurface with respect to such an overall approach to morality? In basing *everything* on caring, doesn't such an ethic show a bias in favor of what is typically associated with women rather than men? And does this fit at all with the gender-neutral approach of the present book?

I think, in fact, it does, and the reason why has to do with what care ethics has to do if and when it takes on issues of social justice that extend beyond the individual and family spheres that Noddings, for example, first focused on. Justice ethics has its own notion of or ideas about justice in relation to assumptions about individual autonomy and personhood that have at least been accused of being atomistic. But care ethics presumably cannot conceive justice in such terms: it clearly needs to rethink the idea of justice in its own terms, come up with its own distinctive conception of justice; and that reconfigured view of what justice involves will have to handle cases and deal with objections and offer explanations that on the whole do as well as or better than what traditional ("justice-ethical" or liberal) approaches to justice have to offer. And many of us care ethicists have in recent years been trying to do just that. And the reconfiguring needs to occur and has occurred not only with respect

to justice but with respect to the notion of autonomy as well. Care ethicists and feminists have recently argued, for example, that autonomy is better conceived *relationally* than in the ahistorical and atomistic way that Kantians have treated it.

But notice what this means about care ethics. It means that care ethics is dealing with issues and concepts that have traditionally been (conceived as) the territory or purview of men. Rather than avoid (thinking about) issues of justice that typically occupy, or historically have occupied, males more than females, care ethics is now focusing on such issues, but giving its own distinctive connection-emphasizing interpretation of these issues and the notions they centrally involve. So this broader sort of care ethics combines what is typically or historically associated with women—namely, a stress on caring and connection—with what is typically or historically associated with men and not with women—namely, a keen interest in questions about and the concepts of autonomy and justice (and rights). Considered on the whole, this *isn't* a bias in favor of female things over male things, but of course the way this gender-evenhandedness is achieved isn't quite the same way that such evenhandedness occurs or is instantiated in the present book. However, these are merely differences, not incongruities, so I think there is nothing in the present approach to goods and (nonmoral) virtues that should make us question care ethics as an approach to individual and political morality.<sup>16</sup> Thus there is no real tension between care ethics and the views of the present book, and I can see no problem with accepting them both.<sup>17</sup> But, of course, the reader may well not have seen care ethics defended in any full-blown way, and in that case I can only refer her or him to what I have said in *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* and in the more metaethically oriented *Moral Sentimentalism*—or, perhaps better, to the classic works on which my own work and other work in care ethics are in important ways

based: namely, Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, Nel Noddings's *Caring*, and (for historical depth and some of the metaethics) Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*.

But there is more to be said. The ethics of classical antiquity and the modern-day Enlightenment saw the world as intellectually and practically organizable in a unified, harmonious fashion under the aegis of reason, and both the ethics of care and the Berlinian ideas of the present book question this vision. To that extent, they side with Romanticism (the Romantic Movement) in *its* rejection of Enlightenment values and of the unified rational vision of human values that the philosophers of classical antiquity (starting with Socrates) sought to work out. Romanticism put feeling and emotion ahead of reason and rationality and was to that extent similar to most versions of care ethics.<sup>18</sup> But in the present book the emphasis hasn't so much been on the (importance of the) emotions as on the complexity, tensions, and, ultimately, inconsistencies that exist between and among our deepest and most considered ethical values. This, too, clearly contradicts the ideas of rational ethical harmony and unity that were accepted by the (nonskeptical) philosophers of classical antiquity and by the Enlightenment or neoclassical thinkers of the modern period and today.

But what we have said here also *goes beyond* Romanticism (and care ethics) in a very important way. By and large the Romantics never questioned the "perfectibility of man," never questioned the possibility of ideal virtue or happiness, and the main purpose of the present approach has been to do just that. Of course, the Greeks and the philosophers of the Enlightenment saw human perfection in rationalistic terms (e.g., the perfect virtue of the Stoic sage was supposed to consist in being perfectly rational), and (some of) the Romantics had a very different vision of how human perfection might be promoted or attained.<sup>19</sup> But it is only with the work of

Isaiah Berlin that one arrives at the clear and explicit idea that perfect virtue and/or perfect happiness are impossible in principle, and to that extent our arguments here have taken us in a direction not previously explored by Greek/Enlightenment thought, by care ethics, or by Romanticism.<sup>20</sup>

However, the fact that care ethics and the present book are both opposed to the classical, rationalist view of human life and ethics may help us to see how and why it is possible and makes sense to hold the views of the present book in tandem with some form of care ethics. The two represent, in effect, a two-pronged attack on the overall (and unified) ethical view or picture one finds in ancient Greek ethics and in those forms of modern or contemporary ethics that are rooted in Enlightenment thought. That picture sees all ethical value as in principle harmonizable under the aegis of reason, and care ethics objects to the “aegis of reason” part of that description, whereas the arguments offered here seek to undercut the somewhat different idea of harmonizability (whether understood rationalistically or Romantically). I believe these two ways of objecting to classical/Enlightenment views have more critical force taken together than they do taken separately, and that is at least part of what makes it natural and sensible to accept both care ethics and the Berlinian thesis of the impossibility of perfection (or complete ethical harmony).<sup>21</sup>

I might just add, too, that the opposition between care ethics and the present book, on the one hand, and classical/Enlightenment views, on the other, to some extent parallels the opposition between Dionysian and Apollonian values that Nietzsche describes in *The Birth of Tragedy*. But Nietzsche doesn’t make much use of analytic philosophical arguments, so, as we have done with Isaiah Berlin, the present book seeks to give rational analytic arguments for ideas that have previously been expressed (only) passionately, impressionistically, intuitively, or very approximately.



Perhaps it is ironic that my argument for disunity in human good and virtue should be expressed via a theoretical approach that itself (I hope) isn't disunified or lacking in unity (any more than Greek or Enlightenment ethical views are lacking in unity *as views*). But in the area of theoretical or epistemic rationality, skeptics try to convince us, via theoretical reason, of such reason's own impotence, its inability to deliver conclusions that many or all of us believe to be true; and even if skepticism fails as a rational enterprise, the idea of using epistemic or theoretical reason to defeat such reason (via a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*) is certainly not ruled out *ab initio*. By the same token (and perhaps more obviously), the use of systematic or unified intellectual/ethical reasoning (mixed, I can only hope, with some measure of insight and emotional/psychological sensitivity) to call ethical rationalism and the unity of ethics into question also isn't ruled out from the start. That is what I have been to a certain extent doing here, and the only question is whether that effort, and our arguments and assumptions, have really been convincing. But one final point.

My reference just now to my own desire as an ethicist to combine intellectual/theoretical reasoning with some measure of insight and sensitivity raises an issue that sits quite comfortably alongside the question of whether care ethics can or does combine traditionally masculine and feminine elements, but that needs to be addressed in its own right: the issue of masculine vs. feminine ways of *doing philosophy in general*. Gilligan and Noddings have pointed out that certain ways of approaching moral issues can be associated with various differences between men and women that exist at least under patriarchy, but certain ways of *doing philosophy* can also be associated more with traditionally masculine or with traditionally feminine traits, and I want to suggest not only that care ethics should contain an (as traditionally conceived) feminine approach to concepts that

are (traditionally) more associated with men than with women, but that it should also be pursued via methods, philosophical methods, some of which are more associated in our minds with women and others of which we associate with men. Care ethics needs to be insightful and emotionally/psychologically sensitive, but it also needs to address various philosophical issues making use of all the analytic and theory-building skills it can muster. But I won't pursue this thought right here and want to leave it for discussion in a separate appendix to this book.

## Relational Profiles of Goods and Virtues

We have offered a complex picture of human goods and virtues, but things are about to get more complicated. I earlier mentioned and used the notion of a dependent good/virtue—and the further and (for our purposes) central concept of a partial good/virtue was also introduced. But at a certain point in thinking about these topics, it occurred to me that our talk of dependency in particular was rather limited or regimented. Earlier in this book and in my 1983 book *Goods and Virtues*, I spoke of some virtues' being dependent on others, and some (personal) goods' being dependent on others—but there was never any talk of goods' depending on virtues or virtues' depending on goods, never any mention of the possibility of what (since goods and virtues are both ethical categories) we can call transcategorical ethical dependencies. Yet some of my own work on virtue ethics and its history had assumed such transcategorical dependencies without explicitly making use of that (precise) notion.

The Stoics believe, for example, that overall human good or happiness depends on one's being (totally) virtuous, and that is, in our new terms, a kind of transcategorical dependency. And one doesn't have to take as extreme a view as Stoicism in order to find examples of such ethical dependency. As I suggested earlier, one cannot really *accomplish* anything unless one has worked with

strength of purpose (or perseverance), and here we have an example where a *particular* personal good, accomplishment or achievement, is seen as dependent on a *particular* human virtue, strength of purpose or perseverance. But are there transcategorical ethical dependencies in the opposite direction, plausible instances of virtues that depend on particular human goods? Well, I think there are, but before I say more about that, let me just say a bit more about what I propose to do in the present chapter.

There have been many comparative studies of the virtues in recent years. But the most prominent of these—and I am thinking in particular of the work of Thomas Hurka and Christine Swanton—tend to focus on the content of particular virtues and to put less emphasis on how the virtues relate to each other.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, although these studies have been pluralistic about the virtues, they haven't spoken (at least explicitly) about how various virtues depend on each other, and they certainly haven't focused on the relations of dependency that exist *among* (a plurality of) human goods or on those that exist *between* individual goods and individual virtues (what I am calling transcategorical ethical dependencies). To that extent, the (differing) pictures or profiles of the different virtues that other authors have offered have been largely *internal* to the various individual virtues they have focused on, and I am proposing to discuss a number of virtues and goods as they relate to *other* virtues or goods.<sup>2</sup> I hope and believe that such *relational* profiles both of the virtues and of personal goods will complement, rather than (in principle) conflict with, what internal(ist) approaches have said, and we will see that what we have to say in relational terms is actually quite complex. However, the complexity is not, as I shall argue, imposed or gratuitous, but (once again) simply reflects the diversity and richness (and interestingness) of ethical phenomena.

Before I get back to the topic of virtues' depending on goods, I would like to say more about transcategorical dependencies that move in the opposite direction. Just above, I mentioned two potential examples of goods' (or a good life's) depending on virtues or virtue, but there are many, many more, and we should say something about the other examples. In chapter 1, I mentioned a couple of instances where goods putatively depend on other goods, but I think the instances in which particular human goods depend on particular virtues may in fact be more numerous.

Thus the good of personal relationships seems to depend on one or another relevant form of caring—because we don't accord any particular value as such to relations of hostility or to relationships based on purely utilitarian (in the ordinary sense) considerations. Of course, the good of civic friendship will depend on a different (and less intimate) kind of caring from what ordinary friendship requires, but we think well of both kinds of caring and to that extent can regard both kinds as virtues, and in general the relationships we think of as among life's good things all entail one or another form of virtue. Consider next the personal good of deep knowledge or wisdom (we can also think of wisdom as a virtue, but let us put that point mainly to one side). We may not place a value on having sheer information, but we do tend to think that someone is better off for being wise, even if the wisdom is hard-won and makes one unhappily aware of how bad or inexplicable things are in human affairs or in the universe overall or in one's own life. And, as I have argued at great length elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> wisdom (either as a human good or as a virtue) seems to require us to have a certain kind of courage: not battlefield courage, but the courage to face unpleasant facts about oneself, about the human condition, and/or about the nature of the universe. It originally required courage (and I suppose for some it still requires courage) to believe in the theory of evolution, and it

can certainly take courage to recognize the difficulty of justifying (or the epistemologically problematic character of) theistic belief. It also takes courage to face one's own inner demons, and yet all of these things seem necessary to being a wise person.

Now objective list accounts of human good vary to some extent among themselves as to what basic goods they say are to be included on an accurate objective list. But almost all such lists include wisdom, achievement, and friendship/love as among the basic goods of human life. And we have just seen that all of these basic goods depend on given virtues, different ones depending on the good in question. Objective lists almost all include one further human good, the good of appetitive (or aesthetic) pleasure, and one might wonder whether this (final) basic human good also depends on some particular virtue. It might not seem so, since pleasure seems so primitive and basic and virtue so high-falutin', but we shouldn't be misled by this appearance. It is quite possible that for a pleasure to constitute or give rise to a human good, to something that makes our life go at least temporarily better, we have to be to some extent *satisfied* with that pleasure. And in order to be satisfied with a given amount of appetitive pleasure, we can't be totally immoderate in our desires or appetites. Since being to some degree moderate in one's desires is regarded by many as a virtue (possessed to at least a minimal degree), it could therefore be argued that the good of pleasure depends on the virtue of moderation. I have elsewhere argued for this conclusion at considerable length—and attempted to show that this is also Plato's view of the good of pleasure.<sup>4</sup> However, it is enough for present purposes to indicate that in addition to the less controversial transcategorical dependencies mentioned above, there is another important putative or potential example as well. But having now (in the present book) discussed the intracategorical dependency of goods on goods and virtues on virtues and the

transcategorical dependency of goods on virtues, it is time to consider whether virtues can transcategorially depend on goods.

Well, what about being modest about one's possessions? Presumably, the possessions are good things to have, things that make one's life more comfortable and better, and modesty about such possessions therefore seems to be a virtue that depends on one's having or enjoying certain goods.<sup>5</sup> But if one can be modest about the goods one possesses oneself, one can also have attitudes about the goods possessed by others, and if someone who is envious of others' possessions can be said to have the vice of envying others, surely someone who is entirely free of such envy can be said to have a virtue—though it is a virtue for which there is no commonplace and conventional name in English. Here, however, the dependency crosses the boundary between persons: one is virtuously unenvious of the good(s) enjoyed or possessed by others, and in fact this is the first time we have spoken of any sort of transpersonal dependency. Every kind of dependency I have spoken of so far in this book—whether of goods on goods, of goods on virtues, of virtues on goods, or of virtues on virtues—has been *intrapersonal*, has involved only one person. But the example of unenviousness (of being unenvious of the goods that others possess) clearly crosses the boundary between persons, and that means that a full account or picture of various ethical dependencies needs to be expanded. In addition to the distinction between transcategorical and intracategorical dependencies, we also need to distinguish between transpersonal and intrapersonal dependencies.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, once we make this further distinction, we suddenly have a good deal more to say. We just saw that the virtue of being unenvious with respect to others' goods (or, if you will, the virtue of lacking covetousness with respect to such goods) transcategorially and transpersonally depends on the good(s) possessed by others.

(I suppose one could also virtuously lack envy for goods one mistakenly thought others possessed, but I will not consider such cases further.) But perhaps goods can also transpersonally depend on virtues, and virtues on virtues, and goods on goods, as well.

For example, the good of friendship, the good of having a good friend, depends to some extent on the friend's attitude. I earlier mentioned that to enjoy the distinctive good of being someone's friend, one needs to care about the friend, to have in some substantial degree the virtue of being a caring person—and that is an intrapersonal kind of transcategorical dependency. But if one's supposed friend doesn't care about one, then there is something illusory or worse about the relationship, and I think most of us would be inclined to say that where one isn't loved or well liked in return, being friends with a given person isn't a good thing for one (or is at best only a means to the enjoyment of other goods), even if one's own caring or love for the friend is part of the situation. Unrequited love and unreciprocated feelings and acts of friendship are not in themselves human goods; or so, at least, it seems intuitive to say. So if unenviousness is a virtue that depends transpersonally on the good(s) that others enjoy, then friendship is a good that depends transpersonally on the virtuous caring of another person; for a totally one-sided friendship doesn't count as a good thing for the person who has the friendly feelings—or, indeed, for the person who doesn't reciprocate those feelings.<sup>7</sup> (I shall have more to say about one-sided friendships later in this chapter.)

Given that we have examples of the transpersonal dependency of a virtue on a good and of a good on a virtue, can we also find instances in which a personal good transpersonally depends on someone else's good and other cases in which a virtue in one person depends on the existence of virtues in others? Let's return to the good of friendship. We think of friendship (between two individuals) as a reciprocal



relationship, and I believe part of that reciprocity involves the good that each derives from the friendship. I believe that for a friendship (or love relationship) to be good for one of the friends (or lovers), it has to be good for the other, but one has to be careful when one says this. Friends typically say that their good depends on the good of the other, but what is typically meant is that anything bad that happens to one of them independently of their friendship, counts as bad for the friend as well. And I am not talking about that kind of dependency of goods, but rather of the good that each derives from the existence of the friendship itself. The friendship cannot be a good thing for one of the friends and not the other—as, for example, if the one friend generally takes advantage of the other or if one of the friends (assuming this is consistent with their really being friends) generally resents the way they are treated by the other. Friendship thus involves not only a reciprocal *relationship*, but also a reciprocity (or mutuality) in the good that each derives from the fact or reality of that close and mutually caring relationship (a good that may include, but is far from limited to the good and pleasant things they do with or to one another). So this is an example of how goods can transpersonally depend on other goods.

But I have not been able to find any complementary example of virtues transpersonally depending on other virtues. We naturally think of certain goods (and feelings) as reciprocal, but don't seem to have any use for or familiarity with the notion of a *reciprocal virtue*. Even in one-sided friendships, the caring concern one of the parties has for the other seems still to be to some extent admirable, to count as something of a virtue. We might think that the person who never gets any help or affection from his or her supposed friend would be entitled to stop caring about and doing things for such a friend, but if someone continues to care about someone who doesn't reciprocate, there is something at least a bit lovely (though, of course, also sad)

about their attitude and motivation. (I am assuming that such continued caring doesn't have to be masochistic.) So I am loath to say that such cases give us an example of a virtue (of caring) whose status as such depends on its being virtuously reciprocated by another person. Similarly, cooperativeness, a willingness to cooperate with others on condition that they are willing to reciprocate, is a virtue. But this virtue doesn't depend on anyone else's actually being virtuously willing to cooperate in return. Someone living in a world of uncooperative narcissists (or worse) who has the disposition to (relevantly) cooperate with anyone who might be willing to reciprocate has a disposition we think well of and can call virtuous. After all, virtue is a dispositional notion, and a virtue doesn't actually have to be exercised in order to count as such. So such a person's possession of the virtue of cooperativeness doesn't depend on anyone else's possessing that virtue or, it would seem, any other. In fact, and as I have already indicated, I can't think of *any* halfway plausible case of one (person's) virtue's transpersonally depending on another (person's).

Nor do I have an explanation of why the interpersonal mutuality that seems to attach to certain personal goods doesn't seem to apply to anything we would call a virtue. And in the absence of such an explanation, one can't be sure that someone (perhaps a reader of this book) won't sooner or later come up with a plausible case where a virtue *does* transpersonally depend on a(nother) virtue. But for the moment, I don't know what more to say and have to leave the asymmetry of transpersonal dependencies (the fact that some goods transpersonally depend on certain virtues, that some virtues transpersonally depend on certain goods, that some goods transpersonally depend on certain goods, but that no virtues seem to transpersonally depend on any virtues) something of a mystery.

At this point, however, we come to what may well be the most interesting or surprising aspect of our study of ethical dependencies,

of the relational profiles of various goods and virtues. We have spoken of goods depending on other goods or on virtues and of virtues depending on other virtues or on goods, and these dependencies in many cases cross the boundaries of self and other. But all the interrelated values we have spoken of are positive ones: goods, virtues, not evils/harms or vices, and there is no reason why we shouldn't expand our discussion to take in the latter. There are two ways, however, of doing so: one less interesting, one (to my mind) extremely interesting. We have spoken, for example, of how certain virtues depend on other virtues, and it would be possible at this point to expand our discussion to take in (the) ways in which vices depend, either intrapersonally or transpersonally, on vices or evils—and then go on to say how certain personal evils, or bad things, depend transpersonally or intrapersonally on vices or other evils.

All this, as I say, would be possible. But I don't think it would be all that interesting. If instead of talking further of the dependency relations of certain virtues, we spoke of the dependency relations of the vices that correspond to those virtues, I believe we would end up repeating some of the thinking that went into our previous discussion of the virtues. And similarly for any expansion of our discussion of goods to take in corresponding personal evils and what depends on them. Nothing very surprising is likely to come of such a discussion—and I think that in the end it would seem and be somewhat repetitive of what we have already done.

But there is another, much more interesting way in which we can expand our discussion to take in vices and evils (i.e., bad things in people's lives—I am not talking about moral evils). We have so far examined how goods and virtues relate to other goods and virtues, and the discussion has to that extent remained completely within the realm of (what we can call) positive values. But what about the possibility that certain virtues may depend on certain vices, or on

evils, either intrapersonally or transpersonally? What about the parallel possibility that certain goods might depend on certain evils or on certain vices? Such *transvalent* dependencies (as we may call them) would be very interesting if we could find them, and surprisingly enough there turn out to be quite a few of them. So rather than focus on vices and personal evils and ask what they depend on, let us continue to focus on virtues and personal goods, but ask ourselves the new questions of whether and to what extent such positive values can depend on negative ones.

In the light of our earlier distinctions between transpersonal and intrapersonal and between transcategorical and intracategorical dependencies, this gives us quite a large *spielraum* for investigation. Given that everything we have described up till now has related to *intravalent* dependencies, the possibilities for transvalent dependencies include the possibility of goods transvalently and intrapersonally depending either on personal evils or on vices, the possibility of goods transvalently but transpersonally depending either on personal evils or on vices, the possibility of virtues transvalently and intrapersonally depending either on vices or on personal evils, and the possibility of virtues transvalently and transpersonally depending either on vices or personal evils. This constitutes quite a large number of conceivable “slots” for transvalent ethical dependencies to fit into, but we shall just have to see how many of those constitute plausible or realistic ethical possibilities. Moreover, and as I said, the idea that virtues could depend on vices or personal evils/ills may seem a bit surprising at first, and so one has to cast about a bit when one starts looking for examples of transvalent dependency. I have myself been thinking quite a bit about this topic recently, and what follows here is what I have been able to come up with.

We have actually already mentioned—not in this chapter, but in chapters 3 and 4—the possibility that a personal good might depend

on a personal ill or evil. The view that one cannot, for example, fully enjoy the pleasant things in life unless one has experienced personal evils like pain or heartache clearly entails the existence of an intrapersonal, intracategorical, but transvalent ethical dependency. But I continue to be somewhat skeptical about that particular view, and I think some of the other discussion in chapter 3 can help us toward a more compelling (though related) example of good depending on personal ill or evil. Chapter 3 argued that the full good of personal achievement depends on having struggled with and overcome difficulties, disappointment, obstacles, and frustration on the way to fulfillment and/or success. But if this is plausible, then we have a reasonable example of intrapersonal, intracategorical, transvalent ethical dependency. And having found one, we turn out to be in a good position to find others, for some very plausible further examples emerge immediately and unproblematically from our discussion of partial goods and virtues in chapters 1 and 2.<sup>8</sup>

Adventure is a (partial) good that comes at the cost of some insecurity; and by the same token adventurousness is a (partial) virtue that depends for its instantiation on the person in question's being less than fully prudent. We have similar reason to believe that the (partial) good of career fulfillment depends on one's having (at least) slightly superficial relationships with other people. And reason likewise to believe that the (partial) virtue of frankness depends on one's being less than completely tactful; and so on for all the partial goods and partial virtues we have considered. Each such good or virtue is paired with another and depends for its full instantiation on that other's not being fully instantiated,<sup>9</sup> and in every case this will involve intrapersonal, intracategorical, but transvalent ethical dependency.

In fact, then, the new categories for relationally profiling goods and virtues that we have been exploring in this chapter help us better

see the nature and implications of the arguments and conclusions of earlier chapters. For we can now say that it is characteristic and even definitional of what it is to be a partial virtue/good that it be transvalently, but intrapersonally and intracategorially dependent on the ethically negative *absence* of another partial virtue/good. In fact, our earlier talk of the pairing of and opposition between partial goods or virtues can be unpacked or cashed out in terms of what we have just been saying about the transvalent, intrapersonal, and intracategorial dependencies that exist between such partial goods or virtues.

But the sheer abundance of such examples of transvalency raises an interesting question about the possibility of *different* kinds of examples. Every example of transvalent dependency that arises out of the existence of partial goods and virtues involves intracategorial and intrapersonal dependency. A partial virtue depends on the non-instantiation of an opposed virtue in the same person who has the partial virtue. And similarly for partial goods. So we have to ask whether the category of transvalent dependency is or has to be confined to intrapersonal and intracategorial examples. Could there be a virtue whose possession depended on that person or *someone else's* possession of some personal *evil*? Could there be a good whose possession depended on that person or *someone else's* possession of some *vice*?

Perhaps forbidden fruit can taste better than fruit one is allowed to have. I am not sure that Adam or Eve had any sort of thrilling taste experience eating their apple, but consider the La Rochefoucauld bon mot that there are delicious affairs, but no delicious marriages. *Such* forbidden fruit might be thought to be tastier or in some other way better than the permissible, and consider more particularly the following example drawn from Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage* (TV miniseries version): The formerly married main characters Marianne and Johan initiate an affair with one another after

each has remarried, and as they are driving off to an “illicit” weekend together, one of them says that what they are doing is indecent, and the other replies: “that’s what’s so nice about it.” This illustrates the idea that a heightened level of enjoyment or satisfaction may depend on the vicious (non-virtuous) character of the enjoyment or satisfaction and so represents a form of (assumed) transvalent transcategorical dependency. And the dependency here may be both intrapersonal and transpersonal, because it seems as if (the couple may be agreeing that) the heightened pleasure that each feels may depend not only on betraying their own spouse but on the fact that the other is betraying *theirs*. (I must say, though, that I am not entirely persuaded by this kind of example.)

However, before we move forward, it might be interesting to make some explicit comparisons and draw some contrasts that have so far have been merely implicit in our discussion. We have made a good many claims about different forms of ethical dependency, have offered brief and (no doubt) partial relational profiles of a good many individual virtues and personal goods, but I think it would now be interesting briefly to compare and contrast what we have said about some of those different virtues and goods.

For example, earlier in this book, in chapter 1, I mentioned the way in which conscientiousness seems to depend on the possession of basic humane values, and this means that the virtue of conscientiousness intracategorially, intrapersonally, and intravalently depends on the virtue of humaneness. I also pointed out in chapter 1 that the social virtue of civility seems to depend for its status as a virtue on there being a certain level of justice in a given society. For example, the civility and good manners of the antebellum American South may not strike one as embodying any sort of genuine social virtue given (in the light of) the near-total injustice of Southern society, so once again we have one virtue (albeit a social one) intracategorially,

(in some sense) intrapersonally, and intravalently depending on another.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the virtue of adventurousness intracategorially, intrapersonally, but *transvalently* depends on the vice of imprudence; and similarly for the relationship between the virtue of frankness and the vice of being to some extent lacking in tact. (Parallel claims can obviously be made *mutatis mutandis* for the virtues of prudence and tactfulness.)

Next, consider how the good of (receiving) sympathy intracategorially, intrapersonally, and intravalently depends on the good of being respected—an example we mentioned in chapter 1; and contrast this with the way in which the good of adventure intracategorially, intrapersonally, but *transvalently* depends on the evil or ill of insecurity and the way in which the good of creative fulfillment (likewise) intracategorially, intrapersonally, but *transvalently* depends on the evil or ill of struggle and frustration. Then contrast all these examples with the way in which the full good of the forbidden is supposed to depend—*transvalently, but also transcategorially*—on one or another vice (e.g., infidelity).

But, as we have just seen, such transvalent transcategorial dependencies can also be either intrapersonal or *transpersonal*, and our earlier discussion brought in a number of other kinds of transpersonal dependency. We saw, for example that the good of friendship for any given person depends on their friend's deriving some good from the friendship (on the friendship's being a good thing for the friend as well). And this is a case of transpersonal, but intravalent, and intracategorial dependency. But the good of friendship for a given person also depends transpersonally and intravalently, but *transcategorially* on the virtuous caringness of their friend. Similarly, the virtue of unenviousness depends transpersonally and intravalently, but also transcategorially on the good(s) enjoyed by others—though in this case the dependency is of a virtue on a good, rather



than in the opposite direction. But all the examples in this paragraph are transpersonal, so every one of them stands in more or less marked contrast with the cases with which we began this review discussion.

As you see, this is all quite complicated. We have a plurality of (bimodal) categories for classifying ethical dependencies, and the possibilities of comparison and contrast may be even greater than what I have just offered you. Still, I think I have said enough to indicate why I think our tools of comparison are rather useful and yield illuminating results. The distinctions we have drawn with regard to (issues of) ethical dependency include the difference between intrapersonal and transpersonal dependencies, the difference between transcategorical and intracategorical dependencies, the difference between transvalent and intravalent dependencies, and (what has been implicit all along) the difference between talking of what a virtue depends on and talking of what a good depends on. (The other distinctions are in some sense relational ones, but this last distinction is one, so to speak, in where one starts.) And there is one further complication.

I have spoken of giving various individual goods and virtues relational profiles, and those profiles have involved speaking of what a given good or virtue ethically depends on. But the full relational profile of any given (qualified) good or (qualified) virtue will also have to include claims about what depends (intracategorially or transcategorially, etc.) *on it*.<sup>11</sup> So I hope you can see that the task of offering profiles of the virtues (and goods) involves much more than Swanton, Hurka, and others have spoken of. It involves relational profiling in addition to the kind(s) undertaken by these other philosophers, and relational profiling turns out to be a highly complicated matter. I also hope the reader will have found the above to be of at least theoretical or philosophical interest. It opens up

some new possibilities of ethical exploration and comparison, and, I believe, adds to what philosophers like Swanton and Hurka (and others in recent times or earlier on) have said about the richness and complexity of ethics.

But having said all this, let me finally—yes really, finally—speak about one further dimension of the complexity or complexities of ethics. At the miniconference on neo-Confucian thought that was held at the Pacific Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association in Vancouver in 2009, I heard a very interesting talk by Yang Xiao (of Kenyon College) in which he spoke of certain values as being deviant. I thought his most forceful example was cultural relativism, which he claimed was a deviant version of the notion and value of authenticity. This makes sense to me, and I think one might also say that to treat authenticity as a matter of simply being true to *whatever values one has* (no matter how perverse or malign) constitutes a distortion of the ideal of authenticity and so constitutes another deviant form or version of that ideal.

After hearing Xiao's talk, it also occurred to me that there is an interesting distinction to be made between deviant forms of an ideal or activity and *variant* forms of an ideal or activity. Collegiate wrestling and Greco-Roman wrestling are not deviant forms of wrestling; they are simply variants of or on that sport or activity. But wrestling on television really is deviant as an example of wrestling—it betrays or distorts the traditions of wrestling by substituting showmanship and deception for a genuine test of “combat” skills. And I think (though Xiao himself didn't say this) that cultural relativism and the idea that any set of values can be authentically adhered to both distort the ideal of authenticity by treating it as it weren't limited or conditioned by other values.

By contrast, the idea of variant forms of some valued activity or institution can be seen in the example of civic friendship. Civic

friends may not be as close as intimate, personal friends are supposed to be, but civic friendship is in many ways analogous to ordinary friendship, and the ways in which it differs from ordinary friendship don't betray or distort the values we find in ordinary friendship or, for that matter, in the kind of just society in which civic friendship is supposed to occur and be nourished. Civic friendship can therefore reasonably be called a variant on or of (the idea or ideal of) friendship.

On the other hand, a one-sided friendship in which one person gives and the other only takes seems deviant as a form or instance of friendship. Of course, some will say that such a friendship really is no friendship at all, and perhaps that is correct. But in saying that such a friendship is a deviant form of friendship we are not necessarily supposing that it is a genuine kind of friendship—"deviant" might be considered an *alienans* adjective like "counterfeit" in "counterfeit dollar." But we probably don't have to decide on the issue of whether "deviant" is an *alienans* adjective or on the question whether a one-sided friendship is really a friendship in order to say that a one-sided friendship is a *deviant form* of friendship. The claim that it is deviant says less than the claim that it is no friendship at all, but it says *something*, something that we in fact would or might like to be able to say and express about one-sided friendships. And to that extent the notion of a deviant form of friendship is or can be useful to us.

Let me give you another example where the notion of deviance can seem to apply and where using the notion can be of some use to us. In *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit says that ethical egoism has in recent times been extruded from the class of theories or views we think of as moral,<sup>12</sup> and if the egoist tells us (merely) what we have most reason to do—namely, advance our own self-interest—then he doesn't use any specifically moral concept and his view is fairly

clearly then not a moral one. But some egoists say that it is our *moral obligation* always to advance or promote our own self-interest, and this claim clearly does use or purport to use a specifically moral notion. However, the notion of obligation involves, for most of us, some sort of binding tie to other people (the Latin root of the word “obligation” contains the idea of tying or binding), and any purely egoistic theory of moral obligation distorts the whole idea of what morality is about because it totally fails to recognize any such ties. Once again, though, we can say that an egoism of moral obligation is a *deviant* form of morality or moral theory without having to commit ourselves to claiming that it is *not* a kind of morality, and this may be what, in all circumspection, it makes the most sense for us to say about it.

Note further that what is extreme or exaggerated (and mistaken) is not necessarily deviant—at least by our common lights. Pacifism may take the imperative of not harming to an extreme, but I don’t think we would ordinarily regard it as a deviant form of morality: misguided perhaps, yes, but not, I think, deviant. That is because its exaggerations don’t run counter to the spirit of morality; rather, if anything, they are exaggerations *both of and in* that very spirit. And the same might be said about the belief that torture is wrong in all conceivable circumstances. Again, this takes morality to an extreme and is a (limited and probably mistaken) form of absolutism, but the extremity seems more an exaggeration of and in the very spirit of morality, than a distortion of that spirit.<sup>13</sup> So I think that, in addition to all the distinctions we made earlier about the relations among the virtues and human goods, it is also useful for us to have the just-introduced distinctions among variant, deviant, and exaggerated forms of an ideal, institution, etc. But note this:

If “deviant” isn’t an *alienans* adjective, then deviant values may be real values in some qualified sense, and that would mean that the

category of qualified values (virtues or goods) would contain not just partial values and dependent values, but also deviant ones. In other words (for example), it might turn out that a commitment and disposition to act in accordance with one's belief in cultural relativism was not only a kind of deviant (or distorted) virtue, but also counted as a *qualified kind* of virtue, and that would mean that we had unearthed yet another kind of qualified value and were moving even further from the Aristotelian picture of virtue and value.<sup>14</sup> But, then, we might also want to say that pacifism (or a refusal to torture under any circumstances) represents an exaggerated or extremist form of (real) moral virtue, so we would in fact end up with four different types of qualified values in our general scheme of things: partial values, dependent values, deviant (or distorted) values, and exaggerated (or extreme) values.<sup>15</sup> What we have said (following but expanding on Yang Xiao's ideas about deviance) allows us to add to the ethical picture of human life and values that we have been drawing in this book, and that is why I thought it made sense to introduce the new notions of deviant and exaggerated value(s) before bringing our main discussion to a close.

## Conclusion

Most philosophers who focus on the virtues have been beholden to Aristotle. They may not have accepted the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean—indeed few present-day Aristotelians are comfortable with that doctrine—but to a considerable extent they accept an Aristotelian conception of the virtues. They don't reduce the virtues to purely instrumental notions; they treat the virtues as objective features of the human ethical landscape; they accept or at least don't explicitly reject the idea of the unity of the virtues; they accept the view that perfect virtue and well-being/happiness are possible in principle, and they certainly don't go in for qualifying or condition-alizing the virtues in various ways.

I said earlier that any attempt to criticize such a basically Aristotelian picture or to replace it with something supposedly more adequate needs to present a systematic alternative picture. With all due apologies (again) to Thomas Kuhn, it takes a picture to beat a picture—and that is something Kripke taught us in *Naming and Necessity*, where he argued not only point for point against the description theory of proper names, but also presented what he explicitly said was an alternative picture of what naming is all about.<sup>1</sup> Now I haven't covered the field of the virtues and human goods nearly as thoroughly as I would like, and certainly not as thoroughly as Kripke covered the basic problems of reference that any theory of naming has (or then had) to deal with. But my criticisms of Aristotle

and others *have* been embedded in a larger picture—one that emphasizes the complexity and tensions within our understanding of ethical phenomena in a way that Aristotle never did and perhaps never was in a position to do. Aristotle wasn't aware of many of the complex issues that distinctively characterize the modern world—with questions about feminism, about individualism, about intrasociety pluralism, and about large-scale international relations occupying us recently in a way they didn't in Aristotle's time (or the Middle Ages).

Now I haven't questioned the nonreductive and objective character of the Aristotelian picture of human goods and virtues; nor would I wish to criticize the Aristotelian approach to certain important virtues like (battlefield) courage and temperance. But I have presented reasons for thinking that the nexus of human good and virtue is much more complexly contoured than modern-day Aristotelians and Aristotle himself ever thought (or imagined). That complexity fits in well with the ethical issues that occupy us today. To take just one of the examples we have mentioned, the difficulty or difficulties of balancing and even of properly valuing career/self-fulfillment and personal relationships is glaringly obvious to us today, and some, though hardly all, of what I have been saying stems from a belief that we have to better understand those difficulties and can't easily blink them away. The idea that those difficulties are not an artifact of particular social arrangements or of certain people's failings or inadequacies and that they indicate something very deep about our (or anyone else's) ethical condition, the idea that the best explanation or account of those difficulties leads us, if we take into account our own intuitive ethical understandings and sensitivities, to the thought that perfect happiness is in principle impossible, certainly represents a radical break with traditional or Aristotelian understandings. And that is something that, other things being equal, we are and should be

## CONCLUSION

intellectually or philosophically reluctant to commit ourselves to. But our radical conclusion here also has something attractive about it, for it could be in some measure consoling to know that the heart-ache, handwringing, personal and family tension(s), and hard-working practical excogitation that have accompanied our thinking and worrying about how to balance career/creative fulfillment and relationships are not due to our own inadequacies or our society's but are basic to the condition of any set of intelligent beings who live in (what we would call) an advanced society. (As I mentioned earlier, they are also not due to "the human condition," if by that phrase is meant something that characterizes humans but might not hold for other intelligent or "higher" beings.)

But the idea of the impossibility of perfection and the applicability of the notion of a partial value extend, as I argued, far beyond the general area of career vs. family. That area marks an area of special feminist ethical concern, but we also spoke of other issues that engage feminist ethics and of issues that extend well beyond any specifically feminist concern(s) in making the case for the impossibility of perfect virtue and happiness and in using and applying the concept of a partial virtue/good/value. If you recall, I argued that the question of whether sex with emotional/personal commitment is better than uncommitted (adventurous) sex(uality) also calls out for treatment in terms of the notion of a partial good, and the position I took on that question, in addition to illustrating the idea of partial goods and the impossibility of perfect happiness, is also responsive to feminist ideas and values and critical of patriarchal "double-standard" sexist views about this issue. Similarly, for our discussion of adventure vs. security as values in a human (or any other kind of intelligent) life.

But the issue of frankness vs. tact doesn't directly concern any issue that feminism or feminist ethics feels called on to deal with,



and our discussion of various kinds of dependent vs. nondependent values takes us beyond the sphere and interests of feminist ethics and makes us focus on issues of general human ethical significance. The offered picture as a whole isn't confined to any one point of view or sphere of ethical concern, but is really very general in its ethical implications, and that is why I am saying that it counts as a general alternative to Aristotelian views. Of course, and as a matter of personal history, I got my effective start with this alternative picture through a consideration of some questions about patriarchy vs. feminism; and those questions and their importance for (many of) us today do much (I hope) to move us in the direction of the alternative picture. But what I have offered as an alternative to Aristotle is based on much wider considerations, and, I might add, this alternative is not *just* an alternative, but, as we saw in chapter 3, is a *diametrically opposed* conception of ethical values. That is all the more reason, I suppose, to be hesitant and even suspicious, so a great deal of this book rests on the assumption that what I have had to say about specific examples is intuitively plausible—together with the case that can be made for saying that those claims about examples have been organized via ethical categories and distinctions which, while somewhat or totally unfamiliar, are philosophically and ethically worth making. So, as I have said, the reader will have to judge for herself or himself whether the radical suggestions, the recommended alterations in how we see and classify things, are really worth it.

Even apart from those more radical alterations, if the idea of dependent values seems to be worth working with, if the notion that our profiling of the virtues ought to have a relational dimension in addition to the more familiar internal one seems reasonable, and if it also seems plausible to suppose that such profiling should be applied to goods and not just to virtues—then much of what I

have been doing will also be worth it. However, I believe and hope that this book will have a larger significance through its attempt to present an alternative, (largely) anti-Aristotelian view of the virtues and human well-being in which Isaiah Berlin's original ideas about the impossibility of perfection can comfortably fit.

The idea of an alternative or alternatives to Aristotle is hardly a new one, however. In the seventeenth century Aristotelianism lost its hegemony over European ethical thought when it became increasingly clear that it was inadequate (as then formulated and understood) for dealing with the kinds of religious and cultural conflicts that at that time were besetting Europe. The ideal of human or political rights and an increased emphasis on legal structures (or analogies) then emerged as a better way of handling the new, distinctive modern political/legal challenges, and, as we know, Aristotelianism went into a deep decline that wasn't even partially reversed till the recent (re)emergence of virtue ethics.

Recent Aristotelianism has sought and claimed to be able to deal better with the problems that the notion of human rights was invented to deal with, and I don't want to question that ability here.<sup>2</sup> Rosalind Hursthouse, for example, has presented a basically Aristotelian picture of social justice in which many, but not all, of our most familiarly claimed human rights are included, and the present book hasn't taken on and at this late point surely doesn't want to take on the issue of whether Aristotelianism is an adequate form of morality.<sup>3</sup> Aristotelianism may now be getting a good second wind on the moral/political front, but, as I have said all along here, the criticisms that derive from the Berlin thesis and the considerations that support it are not distinctively or particularly moral. They stem rather from ideas about the (largely nonmoral) virtues and about the good life that challenge the way Aristotle and most Aristotelians see those topics—and this really is a far cry from

the sorts of criticisms that brought down Aristotelianism in the seventeenth century and subsequently.<sup>4</sup> So what I am and have been saying here is largely independent of those earlier criticisms and focuses on a different aspect of Aristotelianism from what so greatly occupied the Dutch jurists and others in the seventeenth century.

However, there is another issue—which I don’t believe surfaced much in seventeenth-century discussions—that divides my Berlinian approach from Aristotelianism, one that I haven’t really focused on up till now. As a eudaimonist, Aristotle thought (roughly) that if one acts virtuously over a full lifetime one will inevitably flourish, do well in life, and many of today’s Aristotelians are also eudaimonists. But most modern moral philosophers don’t accept eudaimonism, and I don’t accept it either. I think self-sacrifice, sacrifice of one’s own good or welfare, is possible and sometimes morally necessary and virtuous (as when men went off to war during World War II). However, I don’t want to get into my reasons or give arguments for this rejection of eudaimonism, because, for one thing, what I have said earlier about goods and virtues doesn’t (*I think*) depend on that rejection.

Of course, if one does, explicitly, reject eudaimonism, there is less of a necessary overall connection between human happiness and human virtue than Aristotle and most ancient philosophers supposed, and so the rejection of eudaimonism represents another or additional way in which one can argue that Aristotelianism has too simple a picture of virtues and goods. But the theses and arguments of the present book go well beyond anything that a rejection of eudaimonism entails in the way of challenging the simplicity of the Aristotelian picture. The rejection of eudaimonism doesn’t entail that perfection of virtue or well-being is impossible, and on its own that rejection doesn’t offer us a way of dealing with the complex

social/human issues I have been focusing on. It says nothing, for example, about the distinctively modern problems of career vs. relationships or of committed vs. uncommitted sexuality. And similarly, if one thinks about it, for almost every other issue we have spoken of here. So although the denial of eudaimonism further calls into question the unity of the Aristotelian picture of virtue and human good, I think it does so less radically than the arguments of this book do. For better or worse, the idea that eudaimonism may be false is far more familiar and acceptable to most philosophers than Berlin's "extreme" views have ever been. What we have offered, therefore, is a picture of virtue and good that is diametrically opposed to Aristotelian views of virtue and good, and the rejection of eudaimonism on its own doesn't move us in anything like such a radically new direction.

It is perhaps no accident that this book is appearing when it is appearing—and not before. Most of our good examples of partial values emerge from consideration of feminist issues that weren't on the front burner of social or philosophical concern in earlier times—even, for example, during the not-so-distant past when Isaiah Berlin was enunciating his thesis of the impossibility of perfection. (That just adds to my sense of how prophetic his contribution really was.) Certain wrenching choices having to do with sexuality and more generally with how to lead one's life were earlier on not vivid for (many) people in the way they are today, and I see the purpose or function of this book as at least in part an attempt to bring some of these issues to a kind of philosophical self-awareness that has, in my estimation, been lacking or absent up till now. The complexities that feminism and the rejection of patriarchy bring in their train affect all or many of us in our practical concerns vis-à-vis others or vis-à-vis the shape and content of our own lives.<sup>5</sup> But as far as I know the present book represents the first attempt to make us aware of (what

I take to be) the most general philosophical/ethical implications of all these complexities of contemporary life.<sup>6</sup>

To be sure, and as I have indicated earlier, some issues of partial values lie beyond the sphere of feminist ethics—e.g., the choice between frankness and tact or between dependability and spontaneity. But in my case at least, it was easier to recognize the force of the more “neutral” examples once I had seen the force of the issues that derived from or related to feminist ethical goals and aspirations. Those issues are assailing and perplexing us all the time these days, and they seem to me to compel us toward a recognition of partial values and of the impossibility of perfection. But at that point we can also recognize that the same kinds of issues were facing us all along with examples like tact vs. frankness (though these questions were probably less central to our lives). So the present book, abstract and philosophical as it is, is also very much of and for its time. I don’t think it would ever have occurred to me to think along present lines (and follow up with arguments what Isaiah Berlin had so peremptorily stated), if I hadn’t been living at a point in history where feminism is making us aware of wrenching (and divisive) issues that are potentially relevant to all our lives. Nonetheless, the conclusions I have reached are supposed to characterize not just the present time, but the irrecusable ethical situation of human beings and of intelligent beings more generally; and to that extent the philosophical enterprise of the present book has really been quite traditional.

## APPENDIX

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### *Men's Philosophy, Women's Philosophy*

In chapter 5, I spoke about the (as traditionally conceived) feminine and masculine elements that are combined within an ethics of care that seeks to be normatively systematic or comprehensive. Such a care ethics takes in and takes on philosophical concepts, like justice, autonomy, and respect, that supposedly interest men more than women, but it gives a distinctively care-ethical account of those concepts, and the terms of that account (or of the different accounts that invariably are offered within any given general approach) are distinctively (as least by patriarchal or traditional association) feminine: for the emphasis is all on caring, on empathy, and on emotional sensitivity and connection more generally. But at the end of chapter 5, I mentioned the fact that there are also (as traditionally conceived) distinctively male/masculine and distinctively female/feminine ways of doing philosophy in general and, therefore, of working up or developing any ethics in philosophical terms.

I believe—and I shall say more about this in just a moment—that care ethics was initially approached and developed more in an intuitive than in a philosophically analytic or theoretical manner, but there is no reason why those who do care ethics shouldn't combine (masculine) analytic skills with (feminine) emotional sensitivity and intuitiveness. And in fact if care ethics is true or on the right track, there is more reason for it to combine these "methods" than for other approaches to do so, if one assumes that they are the right way to think about ethics. If Kantians are right about the rational roots and grounding of morality, then emotional or psychological sensitivity may just be less relevant and helpful to someone pursuing Kantian ethical theory than it is or would be, if care ethics is or were the right way to go and one were pursuing ethical theory in that direction.

But even Kantian theory cannot do or live without insight and intuition. I don't think of Kant, for example, as showing, in his moral philosophy, very much

emotional sensitivity. However, one cannot deny that Kant's philosophy contains important, even amazing moral insights. Kant was an incredibly creative thinker, and at least part of the creativity involved his intuitions and/or insights about moral matters. For example, his distinction between categorical and hypothetical imperatives corresponds to something very deep in us but never previously articulated by any moral philosopher. So one can certainly say, in this instance and many others, that Kant was intuitively insightful about some of our deepest moral convictions or understandings. This is one form (but only one form) of Kant's philosophical creativity, and there are certainly other Kantian issues and/or concepts that also illustrate this kind of intuitive insight and creativity. (I am thinking most particularly about Kant's distinction between *das Gute* and *das Wohl*, a distinction which, I have elsewhere argued, he was the first to make clearly in the entire history of philosophy.)<sup>1</sup>

But it isn't just creativity in the field of theoretical ethics that requires intuition and insight.<sup>2</sup> It helps to have good intuitions and to have insights if one is doing philosophy of history or philosophy of mathematics, and some feminist thinkers have suggested that even in the latter field *emotional* sensitivities may play a role (perhaps one that is even comparable to their role in ethics). And in fact many of the things I have been and shall be saying here have been said by others—notably by feminists—in other contexts. But I shall also be making some new, some not previously anticipated, further points about the role of masculine and feminine elements in ethical theorizing and, especially, in approaching ethics from a care standpoint that places emotion and feeling at the very center of the moral life (and of moral thought).

Let's consider what actually goes on and is said in the field of philosophy. People give talks and write papers or books, and these things are evaluated to a large extent—and more than I think is entirely appropriate—in terms of how well they stand up to analytic philosophical criticism. But, you say, if they can be knocked down in analytic terms, they aren't likely to be true or insightful, so why am I (or other feminists) making such a fuss? Well, let me give you an example that might help to show why a fuss needs to be made.

In 1985, Annette Baier published an article called "Cartesian Persons" that argued that we are all "second persons," that we have to be a "you" for some nurturing other before we can be an "I" for ourselves.<sup>3</sup> She took this to show that there is something profoundly wrong in the Cartesian/Kantian view of personhood/autonomy that sees us as atomistic units that can be defined or understood independently of all relation to other people. But many philosophers immediately leaped on her argument and accused her of some kind of genetic fallacy. Just because our autonomy and personhood causally require the presence and actions of others in order to develop doesn't mean that it is philosophically best to understand these things *in themselves* (and once they have developed) in terms of those earlier facts and relationships. And I remember having similar thoughts myself when I first read (I'm not sure when) about Baier's views on this topic. But despite the availability of the genetic fallacy retort, despite the fact that her ideas can be easily subjected to the

just-mentioned form of analytic criticism, it is quite possible that Baier's idea here contains a genuine philosophical insight. In fact, I am inclined to believe it *does* contain an insight, but I think that insight could only be generally recognized once some further and very creative philosophical developments had occurred.

In 1989, a short time after the publication of Baier's essay, Jennifer Nedelsky became to first person to explicitly advocate a relational conception of human autonomy, and since that time the idea that autonomy should be understood relationally has become a quite standard way of dealing with or treating that concept.<sup>4</sup> But in the light of this subsequent development, it is possible to see Baier's idea about second personhood for what it is and was: an anticipation of and an insightful way of encapsulating what eventually emerged as the theory of relational autonomy. So an idea can be knocked down or knocked about in strictly analytic terms and be seen, not entirely incorrectly, as involving some sort of standard fallacy, yet turn out to anticipate, insightfully and/or intuitively, a whole new and (to my mind) promising way of understanding traditional philosophical concepts (and assumptions). In placing as much emphasis as we tend to do in the field of philosophy on analytic arguments and criticisms (and the ability to answer such criticisms), we tend to skim on the value of insight and good intuitions (and the kind of creativity they involve or require). And yet new ideas and insights and creativity are in fact the life blood of philosophy and every other field I know of. In musical comedy and opera, the music is considered much more important than the lyrics (that's why it is Rodgers and Hammerstein and Rodgers and Hart, not Hammerstein and Rodgers or Hart and Rodgers—it's also why practically no one remembers the names of Verdi's or Puccini's librettists). But in the field of philosophy—somehow and much of the time—the lyrics are stressed and sought after much more than the music. One is much more interested in pointing out analytic weaknesses than in ferreting out the insights that just might be contained within those analytically weak or undefended frameworks—the example of Annette Baier is only one instance of this pervasive tendency.

But let's for a moment also talk about intuitions (which are not the same thing as insights). We have intuitions about what is moral or immoral in particular cases, and sometimes people's intuitions clash about such matters. When that happens and is known to have happened, those outside the situation and perhaps even some of those within it are quite likely to give up (to some extent) on the probative value, in the given circumstances, of the intuitions on one side or the other of the issue at hand; and sometimes it is said that one needs to do some (better) theorizing in order to come to a resolution of the given issue where intuitions clash. But in fact some people have better intuitions than others, are more intuitive than others. Some people are better in touch with their linguistic intuitions than others are, and the same holds true for moral intuitions and even intuitions about what makes sense in the fields of logic and metaphysics.

However, no one, or almost no one, ever speaks this way. Almost no one says that some people have better intuitions than others or is willing to name names on



that score. And when two people come up with different intuitions, say, about some practical moral question, it rarely happens (as far as I know) that one of the two tells the other that they don't have very good intuitions about the relevant questions. That kind of thing seems or would seem arrogant or like pulling rank (though what rank would it be?); and one doesn't hear of this kind of thing happening. But why shouldn't it?

Well, for one thing, because it would sound arrogant and would probably count as rude (though perhaps not if a teacher does this sort of thing to a student). But in some circumstances it may be rude to speak (what one knows to be) *the truth*. One person's intuitions *may* be better (in a certain area) than another's, but we have developed a philosophical culture in which it does indeed seem rude to question the intuitional capabilities of another person. I think that is at least in part because in our field we don't officially or publicly or educationally place any emphasis on having good intuitions. Of course, there is or seems to be an important difference between criticizing someone's argument and criticizing their intuitions. When, as so frequently happens, we criticize someone's argument(s), we leave it open to them to criticize our criticism(s), to argue right back. But if and when we tell someone that they have bad intuitions, we seem to leave them nothing to say—except to outright deny the accusation—and that seems philosophically unfair.

However, the matter is philosophically a bit more complicated than has just been suggested. If someone accuses me of having bad intuitions, there *are* in fact things that can or could be said in reply. To take just one example, one could point out to the person who is saying one lacks good intuitions that one's intuitions are much more in line with other people's intuitions than are the intuitions of the person who is criticizing one. If one could support *that* claim, one would have a relevant response to the person who had started things by criticizing one's intuitions. And why shouldn't claims like this be supported?

Well, you might say, it would take an entire new field of theoretical research, one targeting people's or philosophers' intuitions and proposing and even theorizing about various factors that may interfere with having good intuitions, in order for people to be able to support claims like this. Yes, but what stops us from pushing ahead with and in such a field? Arguably, it is because we as philosophers don't feel comfortable talking about how good people's intuitions are that we don't inaugurate a field in which the quality of intuitions would be the subject matter under investigation. And we don't feel comfortable about this because we don't place all that much intellectual/philosophical *value* on having good intuitions. We may *rely* on intuitions and to that extent think them important, but we don't think the *quality* of intuitions is (an) important (issue). However, once we acknowledge the value of having good intuitions, then such a field could come into being and, more significantly, we could achieve or come to a more balanced and realistic view of what is important in doing philosophy. And I am going to stick my philosophical neck out a bit further now by mentioning what I take to be a prime personal example of the importance of having good intuitions.

Everyone in philosophy knows, or ought to know, that the young Saul Kripke had, at least in contemporary times, unique powers of philosophical analysis and argument. Robert Nozick called him the sole acknowledged genius in the profession of philosophy, and that genius was manifested not only in his precociously proven theorems in modal logic, but in philosophical conversations with him on almost any topic. He was simply in a different intellectual class from everyone else he argued with—and, believe me, I felt this as much as others did, when I engaged in philosophical conversations with him. What I am saying, then, in order (eventually) to make the point I want to make, is that Kripke's argumentational powers exceeded those of everyone else who was around, including some people, like W. V. Quine, Hilary Putnam, and David Lewis, whose (creative) contributions to the field of philosophy might be thought to be comparable to Kripke's. But what does all this have to do with having good intuitions?

Just this. One can say that Kripke was analytically more forceful and acute than even David Lewis. (Kripke was acknowledged as a genius, but William Lycan once said that Lewis's intellectual powers were simply at the very extreme end of normal human intelligence.) But what may be almost as remarkable about Kripke—and in comparison with Lewis—was the quality of his philosophical intuitions. His (original) philosophical ideas seemed *unencumbered* by his knowledge of and contributions to logic, but, if I may say so, there was something logically or metaphysically muscle-bound about Lewis's philosophical thinking. However, no one ever makes this kind of comparison. Differences with respect to genius, with respect to analytic powers of mind, are spoken of (sometimes quite reverently), and certainly Lewis's ideas about real possible worlds (or about there being, in the actual world, many cats roughly in the same place as any given cat) are sometimes said to be totally counter-intuitive and/or to show a deficient sense of reality. (So when enough people disagree strongly enough with a given person's intuitions, that can get mentioned and talked about.)

But as far as I know, no one ever talks about how remarkably intuitive Kripke was as a philosopher. And yet, despite known and even self-acknowledged personal quirks and idiosyncrasies, Kripke's intuitions were (perhaps they still are) remarkably free of personal bias, remarkably *limpid*. Again, as I have suggested, this doesn't get mentioned because having good intuitions isn't considered important to philosophical practice and education, and, of course, I am saying it should be. But this then means that in the field of ethical theory (and assuming that we are working in the care ethics tradition), we need insight/creativity, emotional/psychological sensitivity, *and* good intuitions.<sup>5</sup> However, that doesn't mean that we don't also need to be analytically or logically alert as critics of what we and others think, say, and argue. So I am claiming that we need both methods associated (traditionally) with men and methods associated (traditionally) with females if we are to do ethics, or care ethics, successfully and well.<sup>6</sup>

When care ethics was getting off the ground, it focused on such female concepts/interests as caring and direct connection (unmediated by rules or laws) with

other people, and in chapter 5, I suggested that it would do better to work with a mixture of male and female elements (understood in traditional terms): it needs to apply its more feminine approach to concepts and ideals that are more traditionally associated with masculine thinking and with men as such. But I want to say in addition that care ethics now needs to emphasize philosophical analysis/criticism and ethical theorizing more than it did in its earliest days. In *Caring*, the first book written specifically on care ethics, Nel Noddings gave us an insightful and in many ways a highly intuitive and sensitive picture of some important and previously neglected aspects of the moral life. Previous ethical theory had skimmed on issues about (and the details of) the moral psychology of intimate relationships, and Noddings's book, along with a great deal of relevant later work by other thinkers, helped to make up for the previous lacunae. Still, *Caring* and much subsequent work in the care-ethical tradition (as it was becoming) have skimmed on philosophical analysis and criticism and have shied away from general or systematic theorizing.

For example, although Noddings (somewhat obliquely) mentions the traditional philosophical problem of justifying deontology, she approaches the whole topic in an impressionistic and, to my mind, inconclusive way, and someone who is more analytically minded can then be left wondering whether care ethics can say anything plausible (in its own terms) about this central, indeed crucial, ethical topic. Similarly, Noddings brings up the issue of whether moral claims state facts and seems ready to assume that they don't. But she never considers the philosophical and intuitive problems that arise for any theory that denies the objectivity and truth of moral claims. Moreover, in her earlier work (though not in her later), Noddings says that caring doesn't apply to large-scale social/political issues, and this means or meant leaving the topic of social justice (or rights) for others to deal with.

I think those who pursue and develop care ethics at this point need to pay (more) attention to the tasks or possibilities of philosophical/analytic criticism and systematic theorizing (this is something I have tried to do in my own work)—without losing touch with the insights and intuitions about the emotional and psychological dimensions of the moral that helped make care ethics so appealing to so many people in the first place. If they or we do so, then there can and will be a balance between (traditionally) male and female elements or factors both as regards the content of care ethics (feminine takes on what are to a substantial extent masculine concepts) and as regards the methodology employed and valued by those who work on such ethics (a combination of sensitivity and intuitiveness with analytic philosophical criticism and theorizing). The balance between male and female that care ethics seeks and exemplifies is not the same as what was unearthed with respect to the issues of necessary imperfection that Isaiah Berlin first explored—there is no issue of partial values in its notions of right and wrong, and though it tells us to aim for better relationships and also better self-fulfillment on the part of those whose lives we can affect and these goods are themselves only partial, that aim doesn't itself necessarily exemplify any partiality of value or con-

stitute a less than perfect form of moral imperative or morality. So what I am suggesting about philosophical and moral-philosophical methodology doesn't, I think, smack of partial value or necessary moral imperfection, and I am thus not saying that when we combine philosophical analysis with sensitivity, etc., we somehow fail to achieve or exemplify some sort of perfect moral theorizing. (There are enough other reasons why we won't achieve or exemplify *that*.) Rather, I am saying that the best kind of ethics and perhaps the best kind of philosophy involve two kinds of content (feminine normative thinking and masculine concepts as a sizable portion of the terrain of such thinking) and two kinds of method (the kind of analytic/theoretical thinking traditionally associated with men and with philosophy done by men, on the one hand, and explorations based in emotional/intuitive sensitivities of a kind we would tend to associate more with women than with men, on the other).<sup>7</sup>

Of course, if what I am saying about method in particular is on the right track, then the field of philosophy is in a sorry position—and women's place in the field is unjustly restricted or devalued. Even though there are probably more women than men working in ethical theory nowadays (at least in the United States), most of those women and men work in philosophy departments dominated by men and by traditional male philosophical thinking. So insight, intuition, and sensitivity to emotional/psychological nuance are devalued even for those (women) who do ethics, because they are judged for tenure and promotion (largely) by men who don't value or even think about such things. Of course, we see bias and mistakes in the opposite direction when those who attend conferences on one or another aspect of feminist thought get criticized for being too analytic or critical if and when they raise objections to points made in one or another paper being given at such a conference. Sometimes the analytic methods and criticisms that get criticized can be or can be seen as ways of fighting (underhandedly or surreptitiously) against feminist goals and aspirations. But they can also be useful and, even, insightful. It is intellectually and humanistically helpful to get things straight, to state an argument or theory in a really cogent and non-confusing way, and those who stress intuition and emotion need to take—or can benefit from taking—this other kind of philosophical value into account (in a nondefensive way).

Philosophy is and always has been a very masculine profession or field. But I am advocating a more balanced or even-handed way of doing philosophy—and of teaching the younger generation how to do philosophy.<sup>8</sup> If more emphasis were placed on having good intuitions and on emotional or psychological sensitivity, women would be more comfortable in philosophy departments, and those departments, in honoring something philosophically valuable that has been undervalued in the past, would be rectifying or starting to rectify a good deal of previous injustice toward women as philosophers.<sup>9</sup> I can only hope that some of these developments are more likely to occur now than in previous times because of the ways in which feminist thought has been articulated and has achieved increasing influence on our culture and politics over the past several decades. (The very fact that

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everyone talks about caring nowadays—every HMO says “we are the caring folks”—is some evidence of this, but many feminists think they aren’t winning or likely in the future to win all their major battles.) Perhaps, this essay, written by someone coming originally from standard analytic philosophy but seeking to accommodate other methods and values, can make a small bit of difference to these desirable potential developments.

## NOTES

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### *Introduction*

1. What I am saying here is rather similar to what Ronald Dworkin has said about the supposed conflict between liberty and equality. Neither of us thinks Berlin's favorite kind of case moves us in the direction of his general conclusion about the impossibility of perfect ethical virtue (or ideal justice). Dworkin also talks about conflicts between one's work projects and one's family commitments and seems to believe that such conflicts might be thought to illustrate Berlin's impossibility thesis and/or do so better than liberty vs. equality does. But Dworkin is somewhat vague about this and in any event speaks as if the work vs. family conflict is *not inevitable*. My own discussion will argue, however, that it is. And I shall consider objections and relate the whole discussion to feminist themes in a way that Dworkin never does. See his *Justice in Robes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), ch. 4.
2. In *Reason's Grief: An Essay on Tragedy and Value* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), George Harris discusses themes and examples that are in many ways similar to those of the present book. I didn't learn of Harris's book until work on the present book was already completed, but let me just mention some important differences between our approaches. Harris discusses the conflict between real values—like creative achievement vs. social equality, being a good parent vs. being a creative thinker or artist, and security vs. liberty—and claims that such conflicts entail that life has a tragic dimension. But his arguments largely rely on empirical/contingent assumptions (like the facts of human physical vulnerability and of large differences in human intelligence and talent), and the point of the present book, and the gravamen of Berlin's original claims, is that perfection is

impossible *in principle* (for some reason Harris doesn't frame his discussion in terms of the notion of perfection). In addition, Harris doesn't make use of the history and ideals of feminism in anything like the way I shall be doing here—and he also is much readier than I am to interpret inevitable conflicts and hard choices as showing the tragic nature of life and as inconsistent with thinking of our lives and our character as good or good enough (even if they aren't perfect). The arguments I shall be presenting are not the same as those offered by Harris, even if somewhat similar considerations enter the picture at various points, and since the force of my arguments here doesn't depend on undercutting those given by Harris, I shall leave his views largely to one side in what follows.

# Chapter 1

1. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
2. But probably not, for example, about courage. Philippa Foot in her book *Virtues and Vices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 15ff., argues (roughly) that we wouldn't call a scoundrel courageous for engaging fearlessly or daringly in nefarious activities. To that extent, courage (unlike resourcefulness) is regarded as a moral virtue.
3. Even though patriarchy has assumed many different forms in many different places over the millennia, I shall be mainly focusing on the forms it has taken in English-speaking countries over the past couple of centuries.
4. For some examples of objective list approaches to human (or personal) good, see James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement, and Moral Importance* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1986); David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and my own *Morals from Motives* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2001). The term "objective list" comes from Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).
5. Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), esp. pp. 178–86. Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 2nd edition, (NY: Harper & Row, 1970), ch. 4.
6. However, the idea that adventure is a significant human good (or value) is sometimes suggested in passing in philosophical/ethical discussions that don't focus primarily on the nature and variety of human goods. See, for example, Christine Korsgaard, "Two Distinctions in Goodness," *Philosophical Review* 92 (1983): p. 185; and Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism" in J. Smart and B. Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 112.
7. For what it is worth, this idea first dawned on me when, seated in an airport waiting to board a plane, I noticed various women approach one woman, who

was pregnant and accompanied by a toddler, and start making conversation with her about her pregnancy and the toddler. It struck me how different all this was from anything that was likely to occur among men, and I started thinking about the causes or nature of the differences. Having offered an objective list theory of human goods myself, it then somehow dawned on me that one item on my list, friendship/love/affiliation, was much more typically emphasized by women and that men's strong orientation toward another item on my list, namely, career success or achievement, had something to do with the lesser emphasis they placed on the first item. It then also occurred to me that such gender-bias didn't or couldn't be said to characterize the other items (wisdom, pleasure) that I had also put on the list. Finally, and still in the airport, I realized that I had stumbled on new kind of difference in voice between males and females: not the familiar difference with respect to morality or moral issues that Gilligan (and others subsequently) had spoken of, but an as yet philosophically unexamined gender difference or traditional gender bias with respect to important human goods and (nonmoral) virtues.

8. My discussion of dependent goods and virtues will to some extent be taken from my earlier book, *Goods and Virtues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), esp. ch. 3.
9. For some historical background on the idea that sex is a good only in the context of a committed relationship, see Roy Porter and Lesley Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650–1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), esp. pp. 218–23; and Ornella Moscucci, “Clitoridectomy, Circumcision, and the Politics of Sexual Pleasure in Mid-Victorian Britain” in A. Miller and J. Adams, eds., *Sexualities in Victorian Britain* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), esp. p. 71.
10. To the extent patriarchy sees (deliberate) adventuring as immoral for women, it will see adventurousness as a moral vice in women. But since we reject such moral assumptions nowadays, there is no reason for us not to regard adventurousness as a *nonmoral* virtue. Note too that to the extent sexism or patriarchy tends to make one think that what it is immoral for women to do (like go adventuring or engage in uncommitted or extramarital sex) can't in any way really benefit women, it is committed to what we might usefully call *sexist eudaimonism*. And such eudaimonism can usefully be seen as analogous to the tendency (e.g.) to regard sadistic pleasure at the suffering of others as really or ultimately not making the life of the person enjoying such pleasure (go) better. Even apart from any general or philosophical commitment to eudaimonism, we have a tendency to think of totally immoral pleasures as somehow not benefiting those who enjoy them (wishful thinking?). So it isn't surprising and there is some reason to think that Victorians and others who regarded emotionally uncommitted female sexual pleasure as fundamentally immoral also tended to regard such sexuality as no sort of genuine personal good. The analogy with sadistic pleasure is clear, and all this supports what we said in the text: that patriarchy tends to see uncommitted female sexuality as offering nothing (personally)



good to women—sees female sexual pleasure as (at most) a good dependent on the accompanying good of having a committed (preferably marital) relationship and sees this dependency itself as gender-relative.

11. For discussion of partial instincts and relevant references to Freud's works, see Franklin Maleson's "Masochism and Sadism" in Edward Erwin, ed., *The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy, and Culture* (NY: Routledge, 2002), pp. 331ff.
12. On moral dilemmas and moral cost, see, e.g., Bernard Williams's *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), ch. 11; and his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chs. 2 and 4. We shall have more to say about dilemmas and cost in later chapters.
13. The analogy with what Freud says about sadism and masochism is not perfect, however, because Freud thinks both these partial instincts are at work in everyone, and I am certainly not saying that everyone is, say, both frank and tactful. (Some people, in fact, may be neither: for example, they can be just plain taciturn.) But one can still naturally say that frankness and tact are paired and opposed, and this is just what Freud says about sadism and masochism.
14. The contrast between adventurousness and prudence, which Berlin never specifically talks about, is very similar to another familiar contrast that Berlin does refer to, that between freespirtedness/spontaneity and dependability/reliability/prudence/carefulness. See his "The Pursuit of the Ideal" in H. Hardy and K. Hausheer's collection of his writings entitled *The Proper Study of Mankind*, (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), pp. 10ff. This second contrast can involve interpersonal (moral) issues much more directly than the first does, though many similar things can be said about both of them. However, I don't propose to discuss the opposition between freespirtedness/spontaneity and dependability, etc., any further here. Finally, let me just mention the contrast George Harris draws between security and liberty in *Reason's Grief* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006). He treats the opposition between these two values as dependent on contingent facts about human vulnerability, so that opposition or conflict isn't as deep or necessary as what I have argued exists between security and adventure. (Harris doesn't explicitly mention this latter conflict.) Also, the contrast between liberty and security doesn't illustrate and promote feminist themes in the way that the contrast between adventure/adventurousness and security/prudence does.
15. But one has to be careful here. Even if career success of her own is not treated by patriarchy as a good thing for a woman, her husband's (or father's or brother's) career success is supposed to be good for her, to enrich her life. Similarly, even if men are not supposed to go in for or benefit from stressing close personal relationships of their own, it is often thought that they benefit (somehow) from having wives, mothers, etc., who are deeply invested in such relationships. So these relevant goods and virtues complement one another interpersonally even if they are thought of as segregated according to gender within given individuals. Of course, once we see both career and personal intimacy as equally relevant to

both men and women as individuals and see them as *opposing* each other within every given individual, we can still see them as to some degree complementary and mutually supportive as *between* individuals. (If couples could be regarded as genuine individuals, most of the claims made in this book would be thoroughly undercut.) Similar points also hold for sadism and masochism: although they are regarded by Freud as opposed forces within each individual, they are obviously to be treated as complementary and mutually supportive as between individuals. (However, with some of the other partial values we shall be discussing, things are a little more complicated.)

16. In saying this, I don't mean to imply that pleasure (or even wisdom) can't have ill-effects. But philosophers can call something intrinsically good without denying it may have bad effects—and one can say of aesthetic pleasure, for example, that it is always good *as such* and independently, therefore, of its consequences. (I here ignore the problem of sadistic pleasure.) My point in the text above has been, in effect, that the opposition between career and enduring emotional connection with others runs deeper than any opposition or inconsistency of “mere effects;” strong personal connection and career creativity are inherently opposed; and I don't think there is any comparable opposition between wisdom or aesthetic pleasure and the other things that figure in objective lists of human goods.
17. Some women who deplore the ease with which men are allowed to choose career over close, loving relationships may themselves place greater value on (having a) career than on close relationships, and to that extent they show themselves to envy the ease with which men are able to have (and are not criticized for having) what they themselves would prefer to have. In addition, of course, they may very well deplore and resent the widespread sexist social *values* that make such a choice easier for men. (I won't cite the vast literature, feminist and otherwise, on these issues.) Note further that if, under patriarchy, men don't always recognize what they are missing or losing out on when they emphasize their careers and downplay personal relationships, then it can equally be said that patriarchy leads many women not to appreciate what they are missing out on when they (more or less consciously and/or voluntarily) choose to forgo careers. (Of course, I am assuming here that we can attain a larger and more accurate perspective on valid ethical values if we free ourselves from patriarchal/sexist assumptions.)
18. Of course, if patriarchal men don't see anything particularly valuable in affiliation or loving relationship(s) and accordingly miss out on a great deal of what life has to offer, one can say it is their own fault. After all, that lack or absence can be said to be mainly due to an oppressive and unjust situation they themselves have largely created (for their own purposes and their own benefit). By contrast, what women miss out on (e.g., career fulfillment) tends to result from injustices that have been imposed on them by men. But my main focus in this book has been and continues to be issues of human good or virtue, not of justice or injustice and its subspecies oppression, lack of respect, violence, etc.

For discussion of how difficult *some* men find it to choose between career and family relationship(s), see Kari Palazzari, “The Daddy Double-Bind: How the Family and Medical Leave Act Perpetuates Sex Inequality across All Class Levels,” *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law* 16 (2007): 429–71.

19. To simplify the exposition here, I am talking of virtues as if it made sense to think of (actively or deliberately) choosing between them. But those who recognize the problem here will know how to correct it. Also, someone can be prudent (or adventurous) in some matters, but not others; and such a person may very well not be prudent (or, alternatively, adventurous) overall or simpliciter, i.e., may not be a prudent (alternatively, an adventurous) *person*. In the main text I am talking about whether someone counts as having the virtue of prudence (or adventurousness) in this larger sense and saying that such prudence excludes boldness or adventurousness as a general character trait (just as overall adventurousness, adventurousness simpliciter, excludes prudence as a general character trait). Similar qualifications need to be made for some of the other virtues and personal goods I am speaking of. But I should also perhaps add that although the virtue of prudence is typically or often correlated with the good of security and the virtue of adventurousness with the good of adventure, someone who isn’t at all adventurous may have adventure(s) thrust on them—and deal with it/them in a prudent manner. In addition, what *counts* as adventurous/adventure for women will differ factually from what counts as such for men—in part, but not merely because men are stronger than women and women are more vulnerable to men (and their desires) than men are to women. But that is consistent with adventure/adventurousness being a partial value for both genders.

I should also mention Philippa Foot’s claim (*Virtues and Vices*, pp. 17f.) that prudence isn’t a virtue in everyone because some people are *too* attached to safety. This seems to be correct and it certainly points toward the idea of the partial-virtue status of prudence. However, it doesn’t make its valid point with all the generality and extrapolatability that the explicit idea of partial virtues and values enables us to achieve.

20. Adventurous people are more likely, I think, to be innovative and independent of others than prudent people are. But the issue of adventurousness/adventure vs. prudence/security remains even after one notes these further connections, and the connections do nothing to undermine the relevance here of the idea of partial values. (I am indebted on this point to Kristin Borgwald.) Note too, by the way, that adventurousness doesn’t entail and may even preclude recklessness.
21. The talk of sexual adventuring here is meant to suggest that the issue of sexual adventure vs. committed sex(uality) can to a substantial extent be subsumed under the issue of adventure vs. security. If the latter two represent paired and opposed partial goods, then sexual adventuring and committed sex can be viewed as representing paired and opposed partial goods that *fall under* and *instantiate* the larger pairing of partial goods. However, in speaking of sexual adventure, I have also ignored the possibility that adventuring (tinged with a

degree of emotional insecurity) can be part of a loving couple's sexuality—perhaps they agree to involve third parties in their sexual doings with one another or agree to swing with other couples or individuals in sexual activities that are no longer (immediately) shared. Open marriage may stretch these ideas even further, but my main point is that sexuality can derive some of its value from the quality of a relationship. *That* is what I mean to be referring to when I speak of the good of committed sexuality, and that good is to some degree undercut if, say, one member of a couple, against all the understandings and commitments of the couple, engages in (adventurous) sexual activities without the other member's knowing it. So having the good (let us assume) of cheating sex undercuts what we tend to think of as a source of what is good about committed sexual activity, namely, the quality of the relationship in which the latter occurs. This gives the sense in which (roughly speaking) the good of *purely* adventurous sex is at odds with the full good of committed sex.

And it also supports the idea that they are (merely) partial goods. When men give up uncommitted sexuality for a committed relationship, they may well be and think they are better off than if they had remained unattached. But they may nonetheless feel or recognize that they are missing out on something, that things are less than *perfect* in their lives, when they (have to) limit their sexuality to a single relationship or to terms agreed on in a committed relationship. And if this is true for men, it seems to me that the same holds for women. If emotionally unencumbered sexual adventure really was a good thing early on in their lives, then there is something less than ideal about later having to live without it, even if on the whole they have a lot to gain by doing so. But of course this doesn't mean that men or women have to *dwell* on what they are missing out on (e.g., variety or pure adventure) when they are involved in committed relationships. One can be satisfied, even *entirely* satisfied, with less than perfection. On this point see my *Beyond Optimizing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), ch. 3.

22. In a paper called "Oppression," which can be found in her book *The Politics of Reality* (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1983), Marilyn Frye points out that today's women face a kind of double bind: if they are sexually conservative, they will be thought of as prudish, cold, or uptight (in a way that wouldn't so frequently have occurred in earlier, more patriarchal times); if they are sexually adventurous, they will be accused by many of being loose or sluttish (in a way that reflects lingering patriarchal values). (Also, the sexually adventurous contemporary practice of "hooking up" seems to benefit males much more than females, and one has to wonder whether this disparity can ever be eliminated.) Similarly, and going now beyond what Frye says, women are in a double bind about career vs. family because if they choose career, they will be said to have forgotten or repressed what they are as women, and if they choose family, they will be accused of depreciating the sacrifices other women have made in order to make it possible for women in general to have full career opportunities (they will

be accused of having “let down the side” or of betraying female solidarity and/or the ideals of feminism). But these double binds in different ways reflect and express (what we can only hope is) the *transitional* nature of what is going on nowadays, the fact that our society and we ourselves are moving from (benighted) patriarchal to (enlightened) feminist values. By contrast, I have in effect been claiming that the choices between partial values like adventure and security and like career and loving relationship(s) are built into the human condition and represent a more *ultimate* or *fundamental* double bind for us because they *don’t* depend on the existence of distorted ideas or values (in some people). But what Frye (and others) have said about present-day double binds needs to be more thoroughly related to and interpreted in terms of the more general/abstract ethical conclusions discussed in this chapter, and I hope to say more about this on another occasion.

23. Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
24. Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2006); and my own *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (NY: Routledge, 2007).
25. There is another area of human goods (at least) where patriarchal values seem mistaken, but where one doesn’t have to infer that “one can’t have everything” or make use of the notion of a partial good. Patriarchy seems to hold that certain consumables are more for women than for men, and others more for men than for women: men are supposed to like whiskey more than chocolate, and just the reverse for women. Men are supposed to enjoy cigars and women are not. And there are even certain drinks that are deemed appropriate for women but not for men: e.g., creme de cacao and “White Russians.” But recently some women have started being interested in cigars, and in the British Commonwealth at least there is some precedent for women liking things like single malt whiskey; and I am inclined to think that there will be more equalizing in the area of gustatory consumption in the future. Perhaps this will even mean that men won’t feel like “sissies” if they prefer “White Russians” to straight whiskey and admit a liking/craving for chocolate. In any event, there is no reason why both men and women can’t both fully enjoy every consumable that patriarchy used to assign exclusively to one sex or the other. (You know, whiskey, cigars, and chocolate go very well together.)

## Chapter 2

1. I am ignoring the possibility that certain clashes between justice and mercy may not be so easily resolvable in ethically acceptable terms, and in fact such clashes might even sometimes illustrate the impossibility of ethical perfection. This is something that Berlin seems to have believed (see his “The Pursuit of the Ideal”

in *The Proper Study of Mankind* [NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997], esp. p. 10), and he may have been right. It is entirely possible that justice and mercy could turn out to be merely partial virtues; but I am not going to pursue that theme here because I haven't been able to think of any really good examples to use in illustrating and arguing for such a view.

2. It may not show, however, that it is impossible to have all the virtues. I can imagine someone (even an Aristotelian?) arguing that the presumed fact that it is impossible to be both perfect in frankness and perfect in tactfulness doesn't show that one can't be both frank simpliciter and tactful simpliciter. The person, for example, who is disposed to be tactful with his friend in the situation I described may be frank enough on enough other occasions to count as a frank person, and similarly mutatis mutandis for someone with the disposition to be frank with a friend in the kind of situation we have described. So the issue of whether one can combine all the virtues may not be crucial to determining whether virtue-perfection is possible, and so I am putting much more emphasis on the latter idea in the present context.

However, note this. Even if we think that, whichever way someone is inclined to choose with respect to their friend in the case I described, they can still be frank and tactful simpliciter, the issue of adventurousness vs. prudence (and all our other feminism-related examples) may seem to us quite different. In the case of frankness vs. tact, it is very difficult to think of a case where they clash as virtues (I had been trying for many years to think up such a case), so since the vast majority of potential situations don't involve this kind of problem, one can think that frankness simpliciter and tact simpliciter could be sufficiently exemplified to be combined in a single individual. But adventurousness and prudence seem to clash more frequently and broadly (and deeply) than this, so I really do think that these partial virtues cannot be combined in any individual (though chapter 3 will give further arguments to this effect). In any event, I want to argue that all the cases we have discussed are the same with respect to the issue of perfection.

3. Some theologians have argued that a perfect God, a God with all perfections/virtues, couldn't make a stone too heavy for him to move. But I am inclined to think that omnipotence involves the capacity to render oneself less than omnipotent. So even if a God who rendered himself unable to move a certain stone would lack all perfections, that God (for all the theologians have really shown) may have had all the perfections "before" he decided to make himself less than omnipotent. I don't think, therefore, that we can argue for the impossibility of perfection along these particular lines.
4. H. P. Grice, "The Causal Theory of Perception," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* supplementary volume 35, (1961): 121–53.
5. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
6. See, for example, his "Theory Change and the Indeterminacy of Reference," *Journal of Philosophy* 70 (1973): 462–81, and his "Quine and the Correspondence

Theory," *Philosophical Review* 83 (1974): 200–28. Relevant references to Quine's work occur in those articles.

7. Berlin never makes this specific kind of claim and in fact never explicitly brings in the notion of a partial virtue or good; but what we are saying here in fact *follows* from things Berlin said about the impossibility of perfection. So we are pointing to implications of his views that Berlin himself may not have recognized.
8. Not every good that is inconsistent with some other good counts as a partial good. The goods may not, for example, be paired in any significant way, but more importantly, neither good may seem or be necessary to perfect happiness. A fully successful lifetime career as an architect is incompatible with a fully successful one as a doctor, and both constitute large-scale personal goods; but (almost) no one thinks an architect's life cannot be perfectly happy because they didn't have time to also be a doctor. Similarly, having a satisfying Japanese dinner on a given evening may be inconsistent with having a satisfying French meal on the same evening, but almost no one thinks that means one can't have a perfect meal on a given evening or, for that matter, have a perfect evening. Once again, therefore, the goods in question aren't merely partial. By contrast, adventure and security *are* partial goods: they are incompatible with one another, and both a life lacking in adventure and one lacking in security will seem to us less than perfect.
9. The scheme will have to make assumptions, for example, about the signification of a term or terms that might be thought to refer to identity, but could be interpreted in what to us is a more complex fashion. Thus if the anthropologist points to two parts of the same rabbit and tries to ask whether the two ostended objects are the same thing, he or she may initially assume that some native term (call it) "ohtoh" means or has the same signification as "is the same as." In that case, if the native answers his question in the affirmative, he may decide that "gavagai" signifies rabbits and "ohtoh" the identity relation. But another anthropologist, on Quine's assumptions, could think of "gavagai" as denoting rabbit parts, and when s/he points to two different parts of the same rabbit and asks whether "ohtoh" applies, an affirmative answer needn't entail that "gavagai" denotes rabbits. The anthropologist could always adopt a translation scheme or manual according to which "gavagai" signified rabbit parts and "ohtoh" denoted the relation of being part of the same thing as. This too would be consistent with the native's affirmative responses, so, more generally, the assumption that the native is referring to rabbits is valid only relative to the assumption that "ohtoh" refers to the relation of identity or sameness, together with a whole host of other assumptions about signification that allow one to square one's overall translation scheme with all the data the native is giving one. And the assumption that the native is referring to rabbit parts is valid only relative to the assumption that "ohtoh" refers to the relation of being part of the same thing as. (Of course, the idea here that ostension is unambiguous is a dubious one, but if one *doesn't* make use of it, it becomes all the easier for Quine to prove his point.) In any event, what I have just said may help the reader better understand how, for Quine, assumptions about signification have a merely relative validity or truth.

Chapter 3

1. Gary Watson, "Virtues in Excess," *Philosophical Studies* 46 (1984): 57–74; A. D. M. Walker, "The Incompatibility of the Virtues," *Ratio* 6 (1993): 44–62.
2. Incidentally, "perfectly happy" is ambiguous as between a psychological interpretation equivalent to "perfectly contented" and an ethical one equivalent to "ideally happy," and I mean to be invoking the latter notion throughout our discussion.
3. One of the sections of Watson's article is called "The Incompatibility of the Virtues," but Watson doesn't *defend* such incompatibility in the article—in fact, quite the contrary; but I shall ignore the details.
4. At one point in "The Pursuit of the Ideal" (in H. Hardy and R. Hausheer, eds., *The Proper Study of Mankind* [NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997], p. 10), Isaiah Berlin speaks rather vaguely of the choice between telling a destructive truth and telling a white lie and indicates that he thinks the possibility of such a choice supports his view about the impossibility of perfect virtue; but since philosophers like Watson and Walker speak of situations involving such a choice in which the possibility of complete virtue doesn't at all seem to be compromised or undercut, one has to say more than Berlin did if one is to use the choice, essentially, between frankness and tact in support of the thesis of the impossibility of perfection. The example I used in chapters 1 and 2 was supposed to support Berlin's thesis by including a detailed description of a situation that it is difficult to make intuitive ethical sense of in non-Berlinian terms. But that was just the point—one needs a better example than Berlin ever gave us and a different and more detailed example than anything considered by Watson or Walker, if one wants to show how and why our ethical understanding of things must move in the direction of Berlin's thesis. Of course, our argument for the Berlin thesis and the existence of partial values didn't depend on this one example: what we said about prudence vs. adventurousness, security vs. adventure, career/creative fulfillment vs. the fulfillment that comes from deep personal relationships, etc., also illustrated and argued in favor of those ideas.
5. Actually, Walker never once uses the term "frankness;" but since he uses all the other terms just mentioned and says he is borrowing from Watson, who does focus specifically on frankness, I won't treat this omission as relevant to our discussion.
6. See Peter Geach, *The Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 160–68.
7. In his writings, Berlin seems sometimes to run together the idea of the inevitable clash of values/virtues and the idea that perfection is impossible: that is, he doesn't always clearly (enough) distinguish between Walker's kind of pluralism and the more radical pluralism that denies the possibility of perfection. However, he sometimes *does* make it clear that he is committed to the more radical view. Keep in mind too that, as we are understanding it, the idea of (objective) values



clashing, conflicting, or opposing one another *doesn't* entail either the denial of the principle of noncontradiction or any other radical notion of the requirements of sheer logic. And, finally, let me refer the reader back to note 8 of chapter 2, where I mention some cases of clashing/conflicting goods that don't entail the impossibility of perfect happiness and are thus not partial goods in the sense of this book.

8. I am defending a kind of complex objective list theory of human goods and virtues, and objective list theories are automatically pluralistic in some sense. But I don't think *such* pluralism necessarily entails the incommensurability or incomparability of values. Berlin, however, did think of (his kind of) pluralism as entailing the incommensurability of various values.
9. I have seen a television advertisement that says that the biggest risk in life is not to take risks, and at least superficially it might seem that this idea could be used to show that risky adventurousness and prudence are compatible: the idea being that one has to take risks in order to be really prudent. Now I can agree that if someone has taken huge risks and they have paid off, then, from the standpoint of that later good fortune, one might see that one would have had a much worse life if one hadn't taken the risk, so that, from that later standpoint, it would have been imprudent not to have taken the risk. But the practical standpoint with respect to action is not a retrospective one, and the attribution of imprudence here is really a nonstarter. And the paradoxical idea that prudence requires one to live or act in a risky or adventurous manner doesn't really hold water if one examines it carefully. Take some would-be academic, a married graduate student working with an eminent professor at a prestigious university who has found a dissertation topic his professor is highly enthusiastic about, but who has thought of another potential topic that promises more exciting and novel results but that is likely to be disapproved by his supervisor. Is it really the prudent thing for him to take on the more exciting topic, given the likely possibility that he will get a less good job recommendation and less good job as a result? Even if the more exciting topic is likely to win him eventual prestige and good job offers, it also puts obstacles in the path of his career success, and if his wife has traditional values and (as we described this in chapter 1), a penchant or preference for security over adventure, she is not going to advise him to go with the more novel topic. Now she may be mistaken to advise him so (even from the standpoint in *medias res*); perhaps he really should persevere with that topic. But no one could reasonably say that in doing so, he was being prudent and/or cautious. Rather, that course of action seems to throw caution to the winds, and even if it is wrong for his wife to cling so firmly to her (patriarchy-induced) preference for security, she is indeed opting for security and prudence in preference to other potential values. So this is definitely *not* the way to undercut the examples and arguments offered in this book.
10. If the person whose life is no longer adventurous is *consoled* by the thought of all the previous adventure, that just shows that she has something to be consoled

*about* and indicates, therefore, that her more secure life is lacking in something inherently valuable. By the way, someone might hold every life should contain some element or period of adventure, but also claim that once one has had “one’s adventure,” further adventure doesn’t add anything good to one’s existence. And there would be analogies then here with what some Stoics said about virtue—namely, that one’s life as a whole will be perfectly happy if one is ever, even for a moment, perfectly virtuous—and with the romantic Japanese notion that when a couple has had perfect happiness, they might as well commit suicide. But these analogies are so implausible that they cast doubt on the idea that having one adventure is ideal for a life. And would someone who had had and was looking back on their one great adventure not be a little wistful about what they could no longer (fully) experience? (Compare what the mother says about her earlier life in the movie *National Velvet*, a movie in which the preadolescent Elizabeth Taylor made a rather startling early appearance.) That would be a sign that there was something not entirely perfect about their later life.

Finally, even if there are differences between how much value different people place on adventure relative to security, that won’t affect the issue of whether perfect happiness is possible. Some value adventure more than security, some value security more than adventure, but we don’t have to decide who is right in this matter or even decide whether there has to *be* a right answer on this issue, in order to see that both sides can or should place *some* value on both security and adventure. In that case, and however they may otherwise disagree, both will have reason to grant that *there will be something lacking* whichever of these values someone “chooses” to emphasize and/or whichever is more exemplified in someone’s life.

11. I say “adult life” here because of some possible objections that might come from my own book *Goods and Virtues* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1983). In that book I argued that we don’t take childhood happiness or achievement very seriously from the standpoint of our lives overall, and it isn’t clear to me that someone couldn’t use that argument to argue that a perfectly or ideally happy overall life could contain a fairly unhappy childhood. But I don’t think I would (now) want to argue this way myself.
12. In *Reason’s Grief* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), George Harris considers the choice between individual creativity/achievement and good parenting and argues against the possibility of (easily) combining them. But he doesn’t consider the kind of “different periods of life” objection I shall be discussing in what follows.
13. What I have been saying is somewhat reminiscent of things Nietzsche says about creative fulfillment/achievement, but I am limiting my claims here to what (I believe) has intuitive commonsense appeal, and Nietzsche doesn’t put such limits on what he says on this topic or others. Notice too how far the present conception is from traditional “aristocratic” values that univocally prefer leisure over work. Creative or career achievement definitely requires work, and it is one

of the most distinctive characteristics of modern thought that it places such a positive value on work and struggle and achievement. One could discuss how all this relates to the Protestant Ethic, to Romanticism, and to Hegel's ideas about master and slave ("Lordship and Bondage") in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but the important question is whether we are really right to place so much value on the just-mentioned things or whether, in fact, a life of leisure is better or just as good. Again, I am going to take a risk on behalf of the modern age and myself and say that we have become sensitive to values that earlier philosophers (perhaps even Plato and Aristotle, though that is a complex subject) *just didn't get*. This is the kind of thing feminists say about those brought up to think in patriarchal or sexist terms, and perhaps we moderns can say something analogous about the kind of thinking about work and achievement that was more characteristic of earlier periods of human history. A life mainly of leisure may simply be, to a certain extent, unfortunate.

14. William Butler Yeats's thought that one must choose between "perfection of the life, or of the work" seems somewhat tangential to what I have been saying about the choice between career/creative fulfillment and affiliative values. But it is surely also *related* to what I have been maintaining here.
15. Those who speak of "the human condition" or "the human predicament" are typically referring (or intending to refer) to tragic problems and limitations that (as that very language suggests) may not beset all possible intelligent beings in all possible circumstances. But what I have been saying about partial values and what both Berlin and I have said about the impossibility of perfection is in fact supposed to hold for every possible rational or intelligent being and not just for humans. The impossibility of making a perfect choice between career/creative fulfillment and affiliative values and the other ethically frustrating problems/situations that arise out of the assumption of various partial values do deeply characterize the human condition, and to that extent they are an important part of the human condition or predicament. But no intelligent or higher beings could ever be free of these difficulties—so they are not *just* due to the human condition or to our humanity.

#### Chapter 4

1. However, I can't resist mentioning that the idea that moral dilemmas are inconsistent with the principle that "ought" implies "can" is almost certainly mistaken. If one denies that obligations agglomerate, one can accept moral dilemmas and at the same time hold that "ought" implies "can." On this point, see Williams's "Ethics and Consistency" in his *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).
2. If you aren't convinced that the citizens of Coventry have really been *wronged* in the example just mentioned (after all, everyone in England had, one might say,

implicitly signed on to a concerted war effort), consider the following, arguably better example of moral cost. You and your husband can afford to adopt an orphan, but only one orphan, and you go to the orphanage to find and choose a child (this is in the bad old days when adoption involved less screening and wasn't in any way difficult). You see two children, Janet and Janine, who might be potential adoptees, and officials at the orphanage tell you that in order to take home one of them, you have to spend two or three hours with each one on her own: they want you to have some basis for choosing between them, lest the whole thing quickly turn into a fiasco. The children know what is going on—how could they not? But at the end of the day or weekend, you have to choose one of the girls over the other, and you do choose one of them, let us say it is Janine. But won't you feel, rightly feel, terrible about having to disappoint, to dash, Janet's newly aroused hopes? Won't you, after the fact, feel that you have wronged her in a nontrivial way? Yet the situation doesn't seem dilemmatic because it can hardly be said to be morally wrong to choose between them, when one really can't afford to clothe and feed both girls and when the alternative to making such a choice would be to adopt neither. (This really does seem different—doesn't it?—from the cases of putative dilemma, like Sophie's choice, that have been discussed in the ethics literature—on which see more below.) I am indebted here to discussion with Jennifer Etheridge.

3. See Williams's "Moral Luck" and "Politics and Moral Character" in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
4. William Styron, *Sophie's Choice* (NY: Random House, 1979).
5. However, any approach to morality (like my own) that gives primacy to inner states and motives needs to explain how such an internalist approach is consistent with the idea or possibility of moral cost. But I don't want to get into issues about virtue ethics as a systematic approach in the present book. (Because perfection with respect to all the virtues, moral or otherwise, is not [just] a moral notion, the idea of necessary virtue-imperfection doesn't raise the same problems for a virtue-ethical account of morality that the issue of moral cost does.)
6. In "Are Moral Considerations Overriding?" in her *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), Philippa Foot says that one may have reason on balance to do something immoral in order to stave off disaster to one's family, but my discussion in *Goods and Virtues* sought to be more specific about possible cases of this than Foot was.
7. For some reasons to doubt whether the Italian father case is a genuine counterexample to overridingness, see my "How Important Is Overridingness?" forthcoming in the first volume of the series *Ethics and Morals*, published by Tectum.
8. In saying this, I am indicating a (possible) disagreement with what Richard Lovelace in the poem "To Lucasta, going to the Wars" says about love: "I could not love thee, Dear, so much, Loved I not Honour more."
9. In *Two Cheers for Democracy* (NY: Harcourt Brace, 1962), E. M. Forster says—in a very Bloomsbury manner—that if he had to choose between betraying his best

friend and betraying his country, he hopes he would have the courage to betray his country. This implies that he would be ethically deficient, if he betrayed his friend and presumably, too, if he merely didn't help his friend, given the alternative of betraying his country. Clearly, what I am saying in the text disagrees with this judgment, and the fact that Foster seems to intend this claim as iconoclastic and as defying or tweaking common (or traditional) opinion indicates that most people would or do find his idea distasteful or unappealing. All I am saying is that I disagree with that idea and think most of us would as well. Let me just mention (again) that I am not taking sides on whether the Italian minister has a moral obligation to actually *turn his son in* to the police.

10. Many or most ancient philosophers seem to have thought that the enjoyment of food was based on the pain of lacking and wanting food—such pleasure was therefore considered impure or “mixed.” But nowadays we commonsensically don't believe this sort of thing. The enjoyment of food may to some degree depend on having *an appetite*, but who says that appetite and a keen anticipation of the joys of a meal one is about to have are in any way painful? (I say “to some degree” because a friend of mine once said—I think convincingly—that the true measure of great food is whether one can enjoy it without having any appetite left.)
11. We could even say that the full good of achievement is (in a limited sense) *doubly* partial because it entails both struggle and the absence of fully satisfying deep personal relationships and because each of those facts or factors detracts from ideal happiness. Note too that I am not assuming that struggle entails suffering (something I believe Nietzsche did assume). But we can still say that happiness is to some degree marred or made less than perfect by the fact of struggle—perhaps that is because struggling may have to be to some degree unpleasant. It is also worth noting that the paired opposite of creative achievement in a career, namely, intimate personal relationship, may also be doubly partial. It may not only undercut full creative accomplishments, but also intrinsically involve a certain sort of emotional vulnerability, risk, and danger. If love or friendship is by its very nature insecure, then it lacks something that, as we have already argued, is essential to ideal or perfect happiness. So (the fullest kind of) intense personal closeness involves the partial evil/bad of insecurity and also precludes the partial good of full-blown creative (career) achievement. (The insecurity can be a matter of possible dangers to those we love or of the possibility of their ceasing to love us or of the possibility of our being unable to be or share things with them.) Notice then, finally, how our somewhat separate earlier discussions of relationship vs. career and of security vs. adventure come together in what we have just been saying. There can be ethical interaction effects between partial goods that are not *paired* with one another, and I hope to be able to say more about this on some future occasion.
12. Note that some of what I have just said about achievement as a human good that requires something bad to happen could be applied to what we earlier said about

adventure. Adventure involves risk and/or danger, and if such things are bad, then the partial good of adventure illustrates the old theodicean theme about good requiring bad or (nonmoral) evil. But (again) spelling out the precise nature of the requirement in this case necessitates a reference to the partiality of the value or good of adventure, so our general picture remains intact.

But what about wisdom, which I have treated as an unqualified good? Doesn't wisdom require pain, suffering, or (at the very least) struggle, and don't we, therefore, at least in this one instance have a case of necessary imperfection that has nothing to do with partial value(s)? Even if it is conceptually possible that someone should be born wise, wouldn't such a person have to have quasi-memories of painful events (occurring to themselves or others), and wouldn't the having of such memories, if they were felt like genuine memories, involve a certain amount of pain or sadness? Perhaps so, and therefore in this case and perhaps others, it would seem that the impossibility of perfect happiness could be based in something other than partial value—and have its roots, rather, in something akin to the old familiar thesis about good things requiring (the appreciation of) something bad. Ultimately, then, there might be two different bases for the necessity of imperfection, but I am certainly far from confident about the assumptions about wisdom I have just been making for the sake of argument.

### Chapter 5

1. *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (London: Routledge, 2007); and *Moral Sentimentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Incidentally, my defense of care ethics (and sentimentalism) involves a (mentally) internalist criterion of right and wrong and is to that extent also a defense of a certain form of virtue ethics. (See especially ch. 7 of *Moral Sentimentalism*.)
2. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
3. Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
4. See Held's "The Ethics of Care" in, D. Copp, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 537–66, and Noddings, *Caring*.
5. In *Beyond Good and Evil* and other works, Nietzsche makes the opposite "mistake" of stressing (solitary) individual creative fulfillment/accomplishment at the expense of ordinary relationships. On the present view, both care ethics (developed and articulated in a certain way) and Nietzsche hold *one-sided* views about the importance of achievement and relationships; and in effect our efforts to avoid such philosophical one-sidedness have led us to say that both achievement and affiliation are *themselves* one-sided, that is, partial, values. However, it is also worth noting that Nietzsche seems to be clearer about the (at the very

least) intrinsic tension between creative fulfillment and intimate relationships than any care ethicist appears to have been.

6. See, for example, my *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*, chs. 4–6.
7. For an example of someone who lays fairly equal stress on the value of relationships and personal achievement/fulfillment, see Bernard Williams in “A Critique of Utilitarianism” in J. Smart and B. Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). Williams speaks of projects and commitments with fairly equal emphasis, and the projects are treated as connected with individual self-fulfillment, whereas the commitments involve personal (or larger group) relationships.
8. It can also seem retrograde or even antifeminist for care ethics not to emphasize helping (other) people—(other) women—toward the good of individual career/creative self-fulfillment (in the way it emphasizes the goal of building and maintaining good relationships).
9. By way of summary, then, certain forms of care ethics have previously stressed the importance of someone’s accommodating and advancing their own career goals, but the idea of helping other people with their careers or creative aspirations hasn’t been mentioned, and this stands in marked contrast with the emphasis some care ethicists have placed on maintaining/enhancing relationships *generally*, a goal that includes relationships one is not oneself directly involved in. A more gender-neutral or feminist care ethics ought, therefore, to place as much emphasis on the general promotion of career/creative fulfillment as it places and has placed on the general promotion of relationships.
10. See my *Ethics of Care and Empathy* and *Moral Sentimentalism*, and Noddings’s *Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
11. But if care ethics emphasizes both relationships and creative fulfillment as things morally to be aimed at, won’t our claim here that these are paired merely partial goods create problems concerning whether or when to prefer one of them over the other? Yes, it will; but if the present book is correct, then every normative moral view that recommends or mandates concern for people’s welfare or aspirations will generate similar problems. So this is not a problem for care ethics in particular or for the assumption that it can be combined with the ideas and arguments we have advanced here.
12. For the communitarian critique, see, e.g., Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
13. The care ethicist who stresses the importance of relationship(s) to individual identity doesn’t necessarily assume that we are stuck with (most of) the relationships we have if we wish to retain our own identity (and improve *our own* lives). For example, in her book (not the article) *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 84, Virginia Held argues that care ethics allows a caring person to break off or disavow abusive relationships and forge new and better ones—though she doesn’t specifically address the

question of how personal identity can or could survive some of the changes in personal relationships that care ethics and any form of feminism would recommend. (For example, a woman who has no birth-family or children of her own and who is over the years abused by both her husband and his family presumably should make a break with such people—assuming she can't reform them. But how, exactly, and according to care-ethical views about personal identity, does her identity survive such a radical break with her past?) But even where care ethicists see certain relationships as inessential, that is not because they think *something other than relationships* can help to make up the difference in or to someone's identity or individuality. Held and others talk about the abused or mistreated individual forming new relationships, but not about the resources, say, in someone's career or artistic life that can carry an individual, and their deepest identity, forward in their life. Once again, this seems one-sided.

14. Among the other kinds of moral issues where care ethics can conflict with the typical Kantian/liberal emphasis on autonomy rights is over the rights of abusive spouses and boyfriends. Questions of how soon and/or on the basis of what sort of evidence courts should issue restraining orders will be answered differently depending on whether one mainly emphasizes individual rights of autonomy or places more emphasis on protecting or ensuring the *welfare* of individuals. And if the liberal too quickly allows courts to intervene on behalf of the (potentially) abused in such cases, they will owe us an explanation of why autonomy rights are less important in such cases than they have claimed they are in Skokie-type cases.
15. See Noddings, *Starting at Home*; Daniel Engster, *The Heart of Justice: Care Ethics and Political Theory* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2007); and my *Ethics of Care and Empathy* and *Moral Sentimentalism*. I am using “justice ethics” to refer mainly to modern-day Kantian liberalism, rather than (say) to utilitarianism, because that is how care ethicists use the expression. And that usage reflects the fact that when Gilligan originally contrasted two moral voices, the voice of justice was conceived in terms that arguably fit Kantian liberalism better than they fit any other normative moral view.
16. Anyone with lingering worries about whether care ethics is biased in favor of traditional female values should remember, too, that the kind of care ethics I am talking about is theoretical and systematic in a way that is much more reminiscent of male intellectual tendencies than of anything historically associated with women('s thinking). However, that doesn't mean that a morally good and caring person needs to think theoretical thoughts or to appeal to some overall ethical theory of caring when they do caring things for other people. A theory of moral justification or rightness can justify what some or many people do independently of (thinking about) that very theory. (On this point, see my “Caring Versus the Philosophers” in my *Selected Essays* [NY: Oxford University Press, 2010], pp. 260–70. But what I say there needs to be expanded on in the light of the later *Moral Sentimentalism*.)



17. Both care ethics and the Berlinian ethical approach of the present book can allow that there may turn out to be some intrinsic or “essential” differences between males and females (not that those are particularly clear categories at this point). For example, and as I have argued in *Moral Sentimentalism*, care ethics may validly apply to both males and females even if male testosterone levels to some extent interfere with empathic tendencies (and make aggressiveness more likely). Similarly, there might be some differences between the genders as regards, e.g., sexual adventurousness or the desire for sexual variety. But such differences also exist between individuals of a given gender, and I don’t see how any of this undercuts the (partial) goodness of enjoying sexual variety or adventure.
18. However (as Benjamin Yelle has reminded me), Romanticism also frequently viewed individual passion and accomplishment as *taking precedence over* concern for group (or family) welfare and/or over moral norms themselves; and care ethics would want to have nothing to do with such a view of human values. (Romanticism can *idolize* a Byron or a Gauguin in a way that care ethics never could.) Note too that the idea (defended earlier in this book) that struggle can make an achievement count for more is very definitely derived from Romanticism. If it seems plausible, that is because many or most of us find certain Romantic notions quite persuasive.
19. For discussion of ancient, Enlightenment, and Romantic views of the perfectibility of man, see John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (London: Duckworth, 1970).
20. Here (as earlier in this book) I am distinguishing Berlin’s thesis that perfect happiness and virtue are impossible from the pluralist view that there is *no single model* of (perfect) happiness or virtue (no such thing, for example, as *the* good life). One can believe the latter while holding that *various* (mutually incompatible) ways of life and forms of human activity are in no way ethically lacking, unsatisfactory, or criticizable. But someone who wants to claim that perfection is impossible must hold that every conceivable way of life is to some extent ethically criticizable or lacking.
21. What also helps make it natural and sensible is that both the Berlinian understanding of human goods/virtues and the sort of sentimentalist care ethics that seems most capable of standing up to and defending itself against ethical rationalism accept the objectivity of (the) values (they respectively deal with). We have said enough to indicate why a belief in partial values (alongside unqualified ones) needn’t call the objectivity of those values into question; but my *Moral Sentimentalism* explains how care ethics can and why it should adopt a semi-Kripkean reference-fixing empathy-based account of the meaning of moral terms that allows moral judgments to be fully objective (more objective than any strictly Humean moral semantics, even an ideal observer view, allows them to be). Of course, such a view of moral terminology makes empathy central to all moral judgment, and most of the human

goods and virtues we have spoken of in the present book don't involve empathy (friendship and love relationships are an exception, but no one thinks an unempathic narcissist can't have interesting adventures or create great art). But rather than counting against the acceptance of both care ethics and the Berlinian picture of values, the just-mentioned difference helps make sense of what we ordinarily think is so special or distinctive about morality as compared with other values.

## Chapter 6

1. See Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Swanton's book is partly based on a prior article entitled "Profiles of the Virtues."
2. However, whenever Swanton compares and contrasts the profile of one virtue with that of another, she is in effect characterizing each of those virtues in relational or external terms, and, given my own nomenclature, this means that she is to that extent giving a relational profile of the virtue that she has already profiled in internal terms. But she doesn't herself count such external characterizations as part of any given virtue's profile, so I am in effect saying that it makes sense to widen the notion of a profile to include factors that are relational with respect to a given virtue. If we do, then some of Swanton's comparisons and contrasts will count as part of a virtue's profile, but, in any event, she doesn't talk about dependency relations as such, and so the present account takes us beyond or substantially adds to what Swanton says about given virtues. Moreover, Swanton doesn't (explicitly or deliberately) offer either external or internal profiles of human *goods*, and Hurka deliberately avoids the whole concept of a human or personal good (except to criticize and express the kind of skepticism about it that one finds, e.g., in G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*). To that extent, what we are doing in the present chapter is much broader in explicit categorial scope than Swanton's groundbreaking discussions (just) of the virtues. Note, finally, that I will for simplicity's sake sometimes speak, say, of a given virtue's depending on a certain good, when it would be more accurate to say that a given *qualified* virtue depends on a certain *qualified* good, etc.
3. See my "The Opposite of Reductionism" in my *Essays on the History of Ethics* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).
4. I discuss this further in "The Opposite of Reductionism."
5. Someone could have the disposition to be modest about possessions even while lacking any possessions and while never *displaying* that modesty. But the phrase "modest about his possessions" entails that the person actually has possessions, and if we can say that it refers to a (highly specified) virtue, then that virtue is a transcategorially dependent one. In general, however, I shall focus on (the

possession of) virtues rather than on their being displayed in certain ways, so one can't really say, for example, that the virtue of fortitude transcategorially depends on one's suffering or having suffered certain ills, because presumably someone can (unbeknownst to anyone) have that virtue without having yet had occasion to display it. By contrast, the virtue of conscientiousness doesn't seem to have to be displayed in order to depend on humaneness: if someone's values are inhumane, then *any conscientiousness they would display* in the name of those values (arguably) wouldn't be admirable, and I think that means that such conscientiousness seems to be lacking in admirability independently of whether it is actually displayed in particular situations.

6. The utilitarian (arguably Benthamite) claim that a trait like benevolence counts as a virtue only if it actually produces an overall balance of human good involves seeing that virtue as transpersonally and transcategorially dependent on the good of those who benefit from it. This may include the agent herself, but it clearly and most importantly takes in the good of others. However, the idea that this virtue depends for its virtue status on actual results is controversial and far from obvious.
7. It is often said that psychopaths, who lack the capacity for emotional empathy, also lack (full) moral concepts. Sentimentalists like myself say this sort of thing (see my *Moral Sentimentalism* [NY: Oxford University Press, 2010]), but the lack of empathy may have other implications as well. Most of us assume that psychopaths are incapable of love and genuine friendship. But if it takes empathy to understand what it is to care about another person, then the psychopath won't really be able to *understand what friendship or love is* and also won't be able to understand why or how *or even that* it is a good thing (apart from its contribution to other life goods the psychopath is presumably capable of understanding).

In addition, if the good of friendship depends on the caringness of one's friend, then it may depend on one's friend's being a good friend and, other things being equal, be proportional to how good a friend that friend is. But our arguments earlier showed that every friend has to be ethically lacking with respect to their dispositions vis-à-vis a given friend (they are disposed to be either disturbingly frank or disturbingly lacking in frankness). This in effect means that no one can be a perfect friend (compare what was said about perfect parenting in ch. 2), and in the light of what has just been said, it would seem to be impossible for anyone to enjoy the good of perfect friendship. For no one's friend can be perfect *as a friend*. This is one more reason for thinking perfect happiness is impossible.

8. There is also the possibility (mentioned in the notes in ch. 4) that the nonpartial and unqualified good of wisdom may depend on having had and/or containing within one the unhappy experience/sense of sorrow. This would then count as an example of a transvalently, intrapersonally, and intracategorially dependent good, and if wisdom also (or mainly) counts as a virtue, we would also then have

an instance of a transvalently, intrapersonally, and *transcategorially* dependent virtue. But I won't discuss any of this further right here.

9. For simplicity's sake, I am here blurring the distinction between the noninstantiation of, say, a given virtue and the instantiation of its opposite. But adventurousness not only rules out the full instantiation of prudence, but entails some degree of imprudence as well, and similarly for our other examples. I believe that we are inclined to think this way about such cases.
10. Two more possible examples (not previously mentioned) of the intracategorical, intrapersonal, and intravalent dependency of one virtue on another: courage and resourcefulness on (relevant) strength of purpose. Arguably, a person won't count as courageous if they lack strength of purpose with respect to the goals or activities dictated by or appropriate to courage. Similarly, a person isn't resourceful if they ingeniously think of ways to solve practical problems but don't follow through. Both courage and resourcefulness may also depend on a certain amount of patience and/or self-control.
11. Given our notion of transvalent dependency, once one includes what depends on a given virtue or good and not just what it depends on in its relational profile, one is probably going to have to talk about what given vices and evils depend on much more than we have here. For nothing then automatically precludes a vice or evil's depending on some virtue or good and our having to talk about that sort of dependency in specifying what depends on a given virtue or good (and is therefore part of its relational profile). I don't think every vice or evil will come into consideration in this way, and an absolutely exhaustive treatment of this area would require one to focus much more on evils and vices than we have. But at least for now, let us spare ourselves these particular complications.

However, note one thing. Above, we briefly contrasted the relational profiles of certain different goods and certain different virtues, and we could have said a lot more about the ways in which various virtues or goods differ from or resemble each other with respect to how they relate to, and in particular depend on, other values. But such comparisons are relational in a *second-order way*, for they compare and contrast some pair of values (two virtues, two goods, or, even, one good and one virtue) with respect to their relations of dependency. This means that value *x* is compared and contrasted with value *y*, with something external to it, and that is to characterize both *x* and *y* in relational terms. But what one is then relating is the way *x* and *y* depend on and so externally relate to various other values. To compare or contrast two values is to characterize each externally or relationally, and so to say, for example, that two values differ from one another with respect to the way(s) they depend on other values is to bring in relationality in a double way. And the relationality of the comparison or contrast between the values is second-order because it focuses on similarities or differences in *how the values relate to (depend on) other values*.

12. Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 129.

13. In *Plural and Conflicting Values* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), Michael Stocker calls the unwillingness ever to torture a kind of “moral immorality.” That supports the idea that such unwillingness is (exaggeratedly) in the spirit of morality and doesn’t constitute a form of deviant morality.
14. In addition, we could perhaps regard certain masochistic experiences as deviant *personal goods*.
15. Variants on a given value are just different forms or kinds of the value, and I don’t think such differences really represent qualifications of a given value or virtue. Humanitarianism and devotion to one’s family could, for example, be said to be variant forms of caring about others, but I don’t think this particular fact in any way *qualifies* their status as virtues or values. So I am not (at least for the moment) including variant values as a kind of qualified value.

### Conclusion

1. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).
2. Part of that greater adequacy comes from the rejection, by most recent Aristotelians, of the notion that the doctrine of the mean governs all moral issues.
3. Rosalind Hursthouse, “After Hume’s Justice,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 91 (1990–91): 229–45. I think I should mention, however, that Hursthouse doesn’t emphasize or seek to justify rights of full political participation—e.g., voting rights—in her account of justice. That strikes me as a real limitation, in contemporary terms, to her approach.
4. On these historical issues and developments, see Jerome Schneewind, “The Misfortunes of Virtue” in R. Crisp and M. Slote, eds., (Oxford Readings in) *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 178–200.
5. Under patriarchal or sexist assumptions many values we can now see as clashing *for everyone* were (as I have argued) widely viewed as relative to sex or gender and therefore as not really clashing *for anyone*. So feminism not only helps us (we hope) overcome patriarchy, but also makes it easier to see the noncontingent complexities and clashes of ethically intelligent living and thereby recognize the deficiencies of Enlightenment or ancient Greek views about the ultimate harmony and unity of our values. And these forms of awareness clearly have potential practical implications for how we (decide to) live our lives.
6. George Harris’s *Reason’s Grief* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006) grapples with various complexities or disharmonies of modern life, but there is only a very partial overlap between the complexities he talks about and those discussed here. And, more significantly, Harris doesn’t diagnose the modern conditions he focuses on as pointing toward the in principle impossibility of perfection.

# Appendix

1. See my “Kant for Anti-Kantians” in my book *Essays on the History of Ethics* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).
2. I realize that in speaking of “theoretical ethics,” my very language suggests—misleadingly on my view—that reasoning and argument play a greater role in the field than insight, intuition, and emotional/psychological sensitivity. But I don’t know what better term would be available here and am loath to introduce a neologism—I’d rather make my points without having to do that. (Similar problems arise with respect to the use of the term “intellectual.”)
3. See her *Postures of the Mind: Essays on Mind and Morals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 84ff.
4. See Nedelsky’s “Reconceiving Autonomy: Sources, Thoughts, and Possibilities,” *Yale Journal for Law and Feminism* 1 (1989): 7–36; and for some of the subsequent literature that follows Nedelsky’s lead, see C. MacKenzie and N. Stoljar, eds., *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).
5. The present discussion doesn’t take in issues that have been raised about the (possibly) gendered character of people’s philosophical(ly relevant) intuitions. (On this point, see, for example, Wesley Buckwalter’s as yet unpublished “Gender and Epistemic Intuition.”) I think one has to separate out any pure gender effects from questions about better and worse intuitions—though it might turn out that one gender or another had better intuitions in one area or another. But this is a topic that requires much further consideration.

For interesting discussion of general skeptical doubts about the value or validity of intuitions, see the exchange between Ernest Sosa and Stephen Stich in D. Murphy and M. Bishop, eds., *Stich and His Critics* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 101–112, 228–36. But I don’t think either Sosa or Stich takes seriously enough the possibility that some people may be more (philosophically) intuitive than others (and the relevance of that possibility to explaining putative disagreements).

6. For reasons discussed in chapter 5, I think that systematic theory-building should be included—alongside analytic criticism, etc.—as among the “methods” traditionally associated more with men than with women.
7. Care ethics emphasizes our connection(s) with others, rather than our autonomy or separateness from others. But the making of *theoretical* connections (as when care ethics draws on results from psychology to help it make its points) is also something valuable, and that kind of theoretical work may, at least in the past, have come more comfortably to women than purely logical deduction or philosophical analysis—which does, after all, involve *separating out* elements in a subject matter treated, for at least the moment, in *isolation* from other intellectual considerations. However, the ability to make intellectual connections (as in the example mentioned above) seems to go beyond sheer intuitiveness or

emotional/psychological sensitivity (as described in the text above), and if (a big “if”) that ability has come less easily to men, we might need to add a reference to it in our description of the feminine side of ethical (or philosophical) methodology. Alternatively, and perhaps more plausibly, this might be a (unique?) respect in which men and women have been *equally* comfortable with connecting and connection.

8. Annette Baier notably urges something similar in her “What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory?” (reprinted in R. Crisp and M. Slote, eds., *Virtue Ethics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997], pp. 263–77). But Baier doesn’t accept care ethics as a comprehensive approach to moral philosophy, and I have also been advocating a number of theses and distinctions that Baier doesn’t consider. Thus (to take just one example) when Baier calls for a present-day Tiresias to combine the male and the female in the pursuit of a really adequate overall ethical theory, it isn’t clear whether she is referring to an integration of content or of method or of both. But having above distinguished between male vs. female method and male vs. female content, I think this Tiresias is definitely going to have to pursue and give expression to both sorts of integration.
9. As a reader for OUP has pointed out to me, the injustice or injustices here have not been a matter merely of an unwillingness or inability, on the part of male philosophers, to recognize the value of intuitiveness and emotional/psychological sensitivity, but have also involved a tendency, again on the part of male philosophers, to dismiss feminist thought out of hand as too ideological or politically activist to be taken (philosophically) seriously. (But I won’t say more about this here.)

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