What Feminism Can Teach Global Ethics I

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FOR AT LEAST TWENTY YEARS, feminist scholars have been wrestling with questions about difference and essentialism, similar to those that underpin current debates in global ethics. Yet mainstream philosophy and political theory rarely mention their contribution, seem to have learned little from them, and often appear to think that no one else has dealt with these problems before. Second-wave feminism has overcome its inward-looking psychoanalytical fixation on difference to reaffirm the possibility of struggle against injustice, enhanced by a realistic incorporation of difference where it really is something more than an excuse for maintaining the status quo. Particularly in practical areas such as bioethics, feminism's version of difference is not quietist but reformist: it does not view all identities and norms as equally valid, nor does it seek to return to a communitarian golden age.

I will qualify these strong assertions with some cautionary notes: to start with, we cannot just tack on postcolonial, multicultural, or global feminisms to mainstream feminism, any more than canonical writers can legitimately tack on feminism to their variant of philosophy by claiming that everything said applies equally to men and women (Narayan and Harding 2000, vii; Dickenson 1997b, 17). Rather, these feminisms make us examine underpinning analytical assumptions and concepts, just as feminism does with the supposedly universal concepts of canonical philosophy and political theory. Essentially, however, I argue that feminism can teach global ethics a counsel of action rather than despair. I do so in three stages:

I. By analyzing aspects of progress and sticking points in recent canonical ethics and political theory concerning questions of difference, particularism, and justice, particularly relating to the *possibility of ethical universals*, which I call *global ethics in the first sense*

2. By arguing that on this *metatheoretical* level constituting the first strand of global ethics, feminist theory has confronted the tension between essentialism and difference in an instructive manner

3. By illustrating how feminism has been working to reconstruct canonical concepts that have failed to take difference adequately into account, with potential impact for *practical policy questions* arising in the context of economic globalization, which I shall call *global ethics in the second sense*

Canonical Ethics and Political Theory: Difference, Universalism, and Justice

There are several possible starting points from which canonical ethics and political theory may be said to have launched their renewed interest in the possibility and limitations of ethical universals. One is the attack in canonical theory on universal human rights and liberal models of justice mounted by Alasdair MacIntyre. Against the notion of ethical universals, MacIntyre depicts a current disastrous state of radical value pluralism in the substance of our moral beliefs, despite our superficial acceptance of unifying liberal rationality as applied to the procedures by which we adjudicate among them. "We thus inhabit a culture in which an inability to arrive at agreed rationally justifiable conclusions on the nature of justice and practical rationality coexists with appeals by contending social groups to sets of rival and conflicting convictions unsupported by rational justification" (MacIntyre 1988, 5–6). This dark picture will not seem implausible in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, and the Iraq War of 2003.

What MacIntyre advocates instead is something to which the Enlightenment, in his view, has ironically blinded us: "a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in a tradition, a conception according to which the standards of rational justification emerge from and are part of a history in which they are vindicated by the way in which they transcend the limitations of and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of that same tradition" (MacIntyre 1988, 7). This assertion entails the inescapable conclusion that no moral system can be criticized except from within the framework of its own culture, its own historical time, and its particular assumptions. That may appear uncontentious to many readers, but in fact it entails deep paradoxes. The claim that nothing can be judged except from within its own culture is presented as being impervious itself to judgment from outside its culture; supposedly it holds for all time. Yet of course many cultures, particularly religious systems, would entirely reject the claim that their truth is relative. Relativism's incoherence lies in the absolute status of truth that it claims for itself, despite its skepticism about all such absolute standards.

A tension remains within MacIntyre's thought: he wants to reject the possibility of ethical universals—perhaps exactly because the detested liberalism posits them—but he cannot come up with an alternative that avoids the problem of infinite regress. The claim that there is instead only the practical-rationality-of-this-or-that-tradition and the justice-of-this-or-that-tradition is internally incoherent: there is no reason for anyone from outside MacIntyre's own virtue-centered, Thomist, or Aristotelian preferred traditions to accept that very statement. However, MacIntyre's presentation of traditions as open to challenge from within does chime with much practical and theoretical work by non-Western feminists. For example, Western and non-Western feminists meeting at the 1995 Beijing conference agreed on a final policy document including this phrase: "Any harmful aspect of certain traditional customary or modern practices that violates the rights of women should be prohibited and eliminated" (para. 112, cited in Okin 2000, 40). I return to this point in the final section.

Although MacIntyre does not frame his critique in such terms, other canonical theorists have presented the dilemma primarily in terms of the current conflict in many Western cultures between liberal democracy and multiculturalism (Kymlicka 1989, 1995; Parekh 2000; Barry 2001). The demand for recognition of ethnic or religious identity seems to enshrine a particular, substantive view of "a good life" and to go beyond the minimum required for (and indeed the maximum possible in) a liberal democracy, that is, procedural agreement (Dworkin 1978). What unites a liberal society is strong commitment to equal respect for all views and to the procedures established by laws and constitutions to mediate between these views, rather than agreement on what constitutes a virtuous or worthwhile life—which the liberal state cannot and should not determine. But without its own substantive "thick" account of the good for humanity, as opposed to its "thin" notion of procedural justice, modern-day liberalism is poorly armored against the demands of contending social groups who do possess such notions, even if unsupported by rational justification.

A bridge between MacIntyre's concerns and those of the multiculturalism debate is provided by Onora O'Neill's *Towards Justice and Virtue* (1996), which can be read as an effort to maintain some form of ethical universalism in the face of multiculturalism and relativism. A global theory of global justice is the eventual aim, although she says this book only tends toward such an account. (Here some caution is called for: the debate about multiculturalism is not quite the same as that about universalism. For example, liberal political theories agree that the state must be neutral between various conceptions of good life, admitting a certain degree of multiculturalism, but certain virtues such as toleration can still be required of all, and some account of universal morality can still be given).

Particularists such as virtue theorists wrongly pass up the chance to say something universal about justice, in O'Neill's s view; conversely, universalists such as John Rawls (1971) and Ronald Dworkin (2000) unnecessarily deny themselves the opportunity to say something about the virtues. Why, apart from the logical incoherence of full-fledged ethical relativism, should we say something universal about justice? O'Neill argues that we actually have little choice: "virtually any agent in the contemporary world takes the *scope of ethical consideration* to be more-or-less cosmopolitan for some matters; . . . those whose ethical consideration must be more-or-less cosmopolitan for some matters cannot express it *solely* by means of a mosaic of restricted ethical principles and commitments for dealing with restricted domains of life, but rather must adopt at least some basic ethical principles whose scope is much more inclusive, perhaps more-or-less cosmopolitan." (O'Neill 1996, 55, original emphasis)

Particularism is inadequate in the contemporary world. One way of rephrasing this point might be to note that particularism erects no barrier against economic globalization (McGrew 1997; Held and McGrew 2001). O'Neill's preferred formulation, however, is that complex modern states must be universal within their boundaries, and indeed across national boundaries, because international economic systems are also complex. Particularism by itself is therefore hopelessly nostalgic. Far from being sensitive to the ethical pluralism of modernity, particularists are largely blind to it, since they see ethical life as encapsulated in distinct domains by rigid grids of categories and sensibilities. Furthermore, one might add, particularisms that claim to be universalisms are particularly blind. For example, many canonical theories of property and justice typically exhibit just that fault, although they may contain concepts that are potentially appropriate to women's liberation if developed into genuinely universal notions counting women in (Dickenson 1997b).

Even if particularist principles could resolve conflict, there is still no reason for thinking them ethically authoritative. Something more basic *is* available, although particularists insist that there is no way for an individual or community to "go behind" justification in terms of identity or traditional practice. We have seen, however, at least in MacIntyre's formulation, that the most we can expect is for individual traditions to put their own houses in order, making them internally coherent. There is no reason for proponents of any particular value system to accept external principles inconsistent with its own logical grounding.

So far we have been examining O'Neill's claim that ethical particularism, in particular virtue theory, wrongly passes up the chance to say something that must be said about universal justice. The other half of O'Neill's assertion, however, is that universalists unnecessarily deny all of particularism, depriving themselves of the opportunity to use the virtues of the virtues. In O'Neill's partial compromise with particularism, some practical reasoning must have universal scope, although some can be permitted to have particularistic scope, provided that it is "followable" by all within the relevant wider community. Special pleading by particular communities can be allowed on a procedural basis, rather than a substantive one, so long as all, including outsiders, can follow the rationale. (Note the contrast to MacIntyre's emphasis, which lays stress on improving the coherence of an ethical tradition's narrative as read by its followers but which, despite the elaborate linguistic metaphors of translation, does not include any such specific requirement as O'Neill's demand that outsiders to the tradition be capable of following its rationale.)

"Followable" means both intelligible to a wider audience, in the Kantian sense that the particular principle's adoption by the wider community would not be logically incoherent, and more stringently, capable of being acted on, offering real possibilities for living in this world. Although O'Neill does not make this claim, I interpret her formulation as ruling out an ethic that offers women no scope for action, nothing to act on, no status as moral agents: such an ethic is therefore ruled out, even if it is intelligible to them as part of a traditional set of norms. For example, conventional theories on property fail to see how women, in what has traditionally been their "no-property world," could be motivated by the desire to amass property and thereby gain security (Dickenson 1997b).

Although O'Neill does not specifically mention feminist concerns, an applied example of similar thinking can be seen in the work of Israeli feminist Ayelet Shachar (2001). As Shachar points out, the logic of both communitarian and feminist arguments is the same: supposed universalism fails to do justice to difference. Like O'Neill, but in a more concrete legal context, Shachar attempts to reconcile justice at the community and gender levels through concepts of "embedded citizenship" and "joint governance." Taking as her starting point the notion that individual women belong to the community of their gender as well as to their ethnic and religious community, Shachar has tried to develop a scheme of priorities and "trumps" that acknowledges difference but stops well short of total relativism.

Martha Nussbaum's *Women and Human Development* (2000) contains similar applied examples drawn from feminist activism, although it shows little awareness of the theoretical contribution that feminism can make to global ethics. Nussbaum's capabilities approach provides the philosophical justification for global ethics in distributive justice, "a bare minimum of what respect for human dignity requires" (Nussbaum 2000, 5). Nussbaum's project is to "identify a list of central human capabilities, setting them in the context of a type of political liberalism that makes them specifically political goals and presents them in a manner free of any specific metaphysical grounding" (Nussbaum 2000, 5). The list of capabilities is of course open to question, and indeed Nussbaum herself has altered it from earlier versions, giving greater importance to property rights (Nussbaum 2000, 78, 80).

(She does not develop her arguments about property at any length, however, and in this she implicitly accepts the usual stereotype, common even among feminists, that women can only be objects of property rather than subjects.) The question for her is whether it is possible to develop a universally agreed-upon set of capabilities, "free of any specific metaphysical grounding" and immune to problems of philosophical relativism.

Nussbaum presents these capabilities in an Aristotelian manner, as those essential to human flourishing. Far from avoiding questions of relativism, of course, an Aristotelian approach invites it, insofar as the qualities or virtues appropriate to flourishing are culture-specific. Nussbaum needs an account of what it is to be human that overcomes such cultural relativism, but too much rests on rhetorical terms such as dignity, human, and flourishing. This becomes clear if we substitute *dog* for *person* and *canine* for *human* in this sentence: "Beneath a certain level of capability, in each area, a person has not been enabled to live in a truly human way" (Nussbaum 2000, 74).

To say that such-and-such capability is "human" means little in normative terms: the capability for violence is also human, although most of us think it should not be encouraged but rather fettered. Nussbaum might counter that she has further specified that these capabilities must be "informed by an intuitive idea of a life that is worthy of the dignity of the human being" (Nussbaum 2000, 83). But, of course, many warrior cultures, including the ancient Greeks, viewed violence in war as the very essence of the dignity of the (male) human being. Nussbaum admits that her notion of dignity is intuitive, but intuitions are largely culture-specific. We cannot get there—the idea of a global ethic, particularly one respecting women—from here, a naturalistic argument. Nussbaum is good at deconstructing arguments rooted in cultural relativism, but she is less successful in providing a universalistic alternative to limit what she terms "the intolerance of cultures" (Nussbaum 2000, 49).

Nussbaum also argues that the capabilities approach has the edge on human rights because it is not uniquely identified with the individualistic Western liberal tradition. Distancing herself from Aristotle, she characterizes her own proposal as "(clearly, unlike Aristotle's) . . . a partial, not comprehensive, conception of the good life, a moral conception selected for political purposes only" (Nussbaum 2000, 77). Here, perhaps, we simply come down to questions of strategy. Nussbaum does recognize that other non-Western cultures also hold conceptions of human rights (Nussbaum 2000, 89), and there I think she is correct. Zimbabwean academic lawyer Charles Ngwena and his South African colleague Michelle Engelbrecht, for example, have described something that sounds very much like human rights in traditional South African law, the concept of *ubuntu*, which they explicitly identify as being compatible with a Kantian, deontological ethical system. "*Ubuntu* signifies the recognition of the human worth and respect for the dignity of every person" (Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act no. 108, 1996, in Ngwena and Engelbrecht 2001, 4). In *S v. Makwanyane*, Mokgoro J said this about the meaning and concept of *ubuntu*:

> Generally, *ubuntu* translates as humaneness. In its fundamental sense, it translates as *personhood* and morality. Metaphorically, it expresses itself in *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, describing the significance of group solidarity on survival issues so central to the survival of communities. While it envelops the key values of group solidarity, compassion, respect, human dignity, conformity to basic norms and collective unity, in its fundamental sense it denotes humanity and morality. Its spirit emphasizes respect for human dignity. (*Hoffmann v. South African Airways*, 11 BCLR 1211, CC [2000], para. 38)

Might it not be a better strategy to appeal to such existing concepts of rights in non-Western cultures, rather than play into the hands of antifeminists whose intuitions are rather different from Nussbaum's own? Why concede ground to what Nussbaum describes as a mistaken belief? That would be the political argument against Nussbaum's capabilities approach; the philosophical one is that a *description* of human capabilities cannot generate *normative* rules without appealing to some prior ethic, probably either a Kantian or a rights-based one. Nussbaum implicitly concedes this point when she notes: "Not all actual human abilities exert a moral claim, only the ones that have been evaluated as valuable from an ethical viewpoint" (Nussbaum 2000, 83). Clearly there is a risk of infinite regress here. Can more specifically feminist theories teach canonical theorists a way out of these and the other dilemmas identified in this section?

What Feminism Can Teach Global Ethics I: Theory

Nussbaum is leading us in the right direction by suggesting that we look to feminism to resolve the question of whether a global ethic is possible, but she is right for something less than the right reasons. Certainly the oppression of women matters, and it matters whether a relativist ethic cannot find the right weapons against that oppression. But it is within the theoretical debates in feminism, with which Nussbaum appears unfamiliar, that we can find some glimmerings of a larger answer to that question. If we remain within the boundaries of philosophical analysis but turn instead to feminist theory, something strange yet eminently predictable occurs. The debates that now exercise mainstream philosophy, international relations, and political theory so vigorously, concerning universalism, particularism, cosmopolitanism, and global ethics, have been going on in feminist philosophy for at least twenty years, largely unobserved by canonical philosophers.

In feminist theoretical debates concerning postmodernism, deconstruction, identity, and difference, the very notion that "woman" may slither away has emerged, making it impossible to develop a feminist politics. This tendency is particularly pronounced in the work of Judith Butler (1987) and Luce Irigaray (1984). Irigaray's view resembles Butler's insofar as both present a self in interior conflict, a disunited subjectivity; both rely on the insights of psychoanalytic theory, particularly Freud and Lacan, in putting unresolved and unsymbolized desires to the fore. The identity of the subject has, of course, been a matter of concern in mainstream philosophy since Locke's time, at least; but there is no parallel in mainstream philosophy to the manner in which feminist *deconstructionism* has conflicted with more essentialist feminisms, concerned with preserving the notion of "woman" to retain the necessary political and conceptual apparatus to fight the oppression of women. Feminisms such as the genealogical models proposed by Butler and Irigaray doubt whether such a category as the subject exists at all, as distinguished from interpretation feminisms that enhance women's status as subjects by stressing their unique experience and voice (Ferguson 1983, 14). Without a unified category of "woman," there can be no political impetus toward the ending of women's oppression. A feminist deconstructionist therefore seems to be trying to make herself disappear.

The positive aspect of feminist deconstructionism, however, has been the manner in which it has drawn attention to the possibility of a subjectivity that women can actually own, rather than one borrowed from male psychological development. While Irigaray, for example, is often seen as one in a chain of postmodernist and poststructuralist attempts to deconstruct the subject, she is more concerned about creating a subjectivity that women can call their own. Since women have been deprived of an appropriate symbolic by psychiatric theory rooted in male experience, "they have never had a subject to lose" (Whitford 1991, 83).

In other words, a modified feminist deconstructionism, and feminism more generally, suggests the following for global ethics: ethical systems and ethical universals can still exist, but they must be truly universals. They cannot be particularist theories masquerading as ethical universalism. Much of modern feminist theory, particularly such powerful critiques of liberal democracy as Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* (1988), demonstrated in its early days with great perspicacity exactly how shaky were the claims to universalism of the liberal concepts of political selfhood: citizenship, contract, property, and rights. Later feminist work has reconstructed those concepts to make them genuinely universal, incorporating women's experience as well: for example, feminist theories of the state (MacKinnon 1989), political obligation (Hirschmann 1992), property (Dickenson 1997b), democracy (Phillips 1991), justice (Young 1990), and authority (Jones 1993).

These theoretical developments matter a great deal to feminism for the same practical reason that they should matter to global ethics. If feminists had abandoned the notion of women as a universally identifiable and frequently oppressed group, they would have lost the political possibility of trying to do something about women's rights. If global ethics abandons the notion of universal human rights, it loses the political possibility of trying to do something about autocratic regimes or oppression by the economic forces behind globalization. This is the point I made earlier about why a communitarian, particularist analysis, which says there are only the moral norms of community X and community Y rather than any absolute global ethics, is intrinsically status quo. The same problem applies if feminists concede that there are only women in class X or society Y; we lose any chance of appealing to women's rights as universal human rights to criticize practices that oppress women. Yet without a unified, universal category of "woman," in both North and South, there can be no political impetus toward the ending of women's oppression. But on the other hand, Western feminists have also had to contend with charges from communitarians that they are imposing the values of their own liberal cultures on non-Western women. This is something that feminists from both North and South have also begun to overcome.

Particularly instructive for global ethics has been the way in which feminist theory increasingly combines universalism and difference. Denying that so-called impartialist theories of justice are truly universal, Iris Marion Young, for example, offers a paradigm that can also be applied to the question of whether there can be global theories of justice.

> Universality in the sense of the participation and inclusion of everyone in moral and social life does not imply universality in the sense of the adoption of a general point of view that leaves behind particular affiliations, feelings, commitments and desires. Indeed . . . universality as generality has often operated precisely to inhibit universal inclusion and participation. (Young 1990, 105)

The parallel in global ethics will be a concern with inclusion and participation at the expense of the unifying attempt to create a singular global ethic or set of principles such as the famous or infamous "four principles" of bioethics. Young might well dismiss such attempts to transcend difference as imbued with "the logic of identity," as she does with Rawls's account of justice. Whereas "the logic of identity . . . constructs totalizing systems in which the unifying categories are themselves unified under principles, where the ideal is to reduce everything to one first principle" (Young 1990, 98), the politics of difference does not seek so relentlessly to reduce all differences to unity. On one level, Young offers a rather thin account of global justice, one more concerned with procedure than with substance. On the other, however, her account is deeper, if not necessarily thicker,

than *principlist* accounts seeking to unify disparate global experience into a single framework. Difference is foregrounded in Young's account of justice, but the proselytizing power of injustice is not relativized out of existence. Indeed, she would argue that opponents of oppression are in a better, more realistic position if they employ a transformational rather than an assimilationist model, if they take difference into account rather than impose a single model of justice with no respect for group identities.

What Feminism Can Teach Global Ethics II: Practice and the Global South

So far, I have concentrated on global ethics in the first sense, that is, the question of ethical universals.[1] I have argued that feminism's response to essentialism and difference, and its growing awareness that too much emphasis on diversity can obscure inequality (Phillips 1991), can teach global ethics possible ways to transcend the two extremes of full-fledged multiculturalism and inflexible human rights. Now I examine the impact of specific feminist responses to more particular issues in global public policy, particularly in the wake of economic globalization (Adam 2002): the second sense of global ethics. This is the second thing that feminism can teach global ethics: its legal and political solutions are more concrete, and its discourse further advanced, because it has been dealing with the problems for longer, having perceived much earlier that there could be problems.

The impact of feminism's response to the multiculturalism question at the global public policy level was strongly felt at the 1995 Beijing conference. Whereas previous world women's conferences had been far more willing to subordinate women's rights as universal human rights to indigenous cultural and religious demands in particular countries, women from both South and North rejected that escape route at the fourth world women's conference (Dickenson 1997a; Okin 2000). The final policy document noted firmly that "while the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of states, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms" (Covenant 1995, para. 9–10, cited in Okin 2000, 39). In Beijing, as well as before and afterward, feminist activists also joined forces with more academic or theoretical feminists in a manner that may well be instructive for global ethics (Jaggar 2000; Dickenson 1997a).

Similarly, concepts of women's rights have been incorporated into development ethics and development policy, but tailored in such a fashion as to enable some sort of accommodation with important aspects of traditional cultures. Practical examples include the Indian antirape campaign (Gangoli 1998), the estab-

lishment of women's NGOs and the mainstreaming of gender- by non-gender-based ones (Stubbs 2001), the applicability of Western rights frameworks to the political activity of the female Indian village organizers known as *sathins* (Madhok 2002), and campaigns for women's land rights in Southeast Asia (Agarwal 1994). More specifically, in bioethics, this accommodation has been explored in relation to a wide range of subjects: for example, research ethics in the global South (Khan 2000), genetic justice (Mahowald 2000), female genital mutilation and reproductive rights more generally (Hellsten 2002), and the impact on women in the global South of the commodification of gametes and other forms of human tissue (Dickenson 2001, 2002).

The charge that Western feminists are imposing a liberal model on women in the South has been emphatically rejected by such non-Western feminists as Uma Narayan, who has condemned the dereliction of duties to help on a global scale, caused by an overconcern for cultural tolerance. Narayan offers cogent practical illustrations of the latter phenomenon in her book *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third-World Feminisms* (1997). Well-intending Western feminists, Narayan argues, are too ready to concede toleration of non-Western practices that oppress women; they are crippled by their own guilt, as members of the Western elite that benefited from imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism and that continues to benefit from economic globalization. They are too quick to abandon the possibility of a global ethics that genuinely works for women and are too prone to dismiss non-Western feminists who actually agree with them on its foundational principles of equal gender justice. When Narayan mentions her opposition to *sati*, female genital mutilation, or sex-selective abortion, for example, she is usually met—even by feminists—with the accusation that she is too Westernized to be an authentic voice of Indian women. The only acceptable role for Indian women, she feels, is as oppressed victims. Mired in their own discouragement and stereotypes, Narayan accuses, together with their doubts about the very category of woman, Western feminists too readily ignore what is really a very simple matter of justice—and a call for help. Efforts to avoid gender essentialism and the imposition of a universal human rights framework, she claims, fall instead into the trap of cultural essentialism. "While gender essentialism often equates the problems, interests and locations of some socially dominant groups of men and women with those of 'all men' and 'all women', cultural essentialism often equates the values, worldviews, and practices of some socially dominant groups with those of 'all members of the culture'" (Narayan 1997, 82).

Western feminists concerned with avoiding gender essentialism at all costs wrongly assume that neocolonialism proceeds by privileged subjects, such as colonial powers constructing the "Other"[2] in their own image, taking their situation to be typical of that of all women. Actually, Narayan argues, neocolonialism and

imperialism work by enshrining *difference* between the colonizer and the "Other." Thus, Western feminists are not as vulnerable as they may fear to charges of neo-colonialism if they attempt to work for women's rights as human rights (Narayan 1997, 83). In fact, one might argue, Western feminists such as Chilla Bulbeck (1998), desperate to avoid Orientalism (Said 1995), actually fall prey to it—by taking a favorable view of any non-Western practice to which women in the global South have accommodated themselves, no matter how oppressive. This, too, is a form of treating the South or Orient as "other" and, to my mind, is both pa-tronizing and politically naive.

This argument could be reinforced with practical examples of colonial pow-ers deliberately undermining indigenous traditions in which women's rights were upheld far more effectively than under colonial rule. For example, before the British Raj, widows in Haryana (then in the Punjab) could legally inherit their husbands' property, but male elders sometimes informally circumvented this legal entitlement by forcing widows to remarry within their husbands' families, a prac-tice known as *karewa*. Rather than intervening to protect women's statutory rights, British colonial administrators actually strengthened *karewa* with legal sanctions against widows who resisted remarriage, all in the name of preserving customary law—even when the practice was challenged in British courts by the women of Haryana (Dickenson 1997b, 40). In other jurisdictions of the global South, Span-ish feminist philosopher Celia Amoros, who has had a particularly great influence in Mexico and Argentina, has argued that feminisms of difference have played an important part in demonstrating that women are differently positioned before the law. A feminism of rights and equality can use that concrete knowledge to over-turn that disadvantage (Amoros 1986, 1994).

Conclusion

By using a bottom-up, inductive approach rather than a top-down, principlist one, feminists have become adept at seeking agreement on concrete reforms and practical issues rooted in women's experience: what Alison Jaggar terms "feminist practical di-alogue" (Jaggar 1995, 115). Similarly, whereas "typically, philosophical theories of justice have operated with a social ontology that has no room for a concept of social groups," Iris Marion Young argues that only a concept of justice that begins with the concepts of group domination and group oppression, attending sensitively to real so-cial differences, can succeed in social reform (Young 1990, 3).

Particularly in relation to health and biomedicine, attending to gender differ-ence is not incompatible with women's rights as human rights, but crucial to im-plementing those rights. Although women are affected everywhere by globalization of both the causes of disease and the liberal packages of health care "reforms,"

globalization does not affect them in the same way, and the issues for gender eq-uity vary. For example, while the dominant issues in the Americas and Europe con-cern decentralization of service delivery, powerful women's advocacy groups in these nations are better placed to protest and influence policy at the local level than in Africa, where distances are great and civil society often weak (Sen, George, and Ostlin 2002). As Rosemarie Tong puts it,

> we all experience pain, suffering and death; and since we are all equal in this way, it is the task of health care to serve each of us as if we were the paradigm case of treatment for everyone. Feminist bioethicists are among the leaders in the move-ment to make health care attentive to peoples' *differences* so that it can help people become the *same*—that is, equally autonomous and equally the recipients of benef-icent clinical practices and just health care policies. (Tong 2000, 24)

We do not have to indulge in any claims about the global feminist "commu-nity" as being either unified or powerful to think that feminism has something to teach global ethics. To do so would be to fall into the same trap for which I criti-cized MacIntyre, at the very beginning of this chapter. The notion of "imagined community," which originates in Benedict Anderson's 1983 book of that title on nationalism, has been used by some feminist writers such as Ann Ferguson to en-able us to imagine a global feminism, but others such as Margaret Urban Walker are skeptical: "Imagined communities are seductive because they yield real psychic comforts, powerful feelings of belonging and mattering; imagined communities are irrelevant or dangerous because they distract our attention from actual communi-ties" (Walker 1994, 54)—and power inequalities within them. Nevertheless, Ali-son Jaggar, from whom this summary is taken, thinks the global feminist community is already becoming something of a reality, in terms of practical efforts around the world against women's subordination. The notion is still useful, pro-vided we think not in terms of global feminism but of global feminisms (Jaggar 2000, 21): a precise parallel to my own preference for "global ethics" in the plural.

Notes

1. I use the term *global South* in conformity with much work in development studies, as an economic and political rather than geographical term. By global South I mean those states characterized by relative poverty, significant international debt, vulnerability to structural adjustment programs, and concomitant scaling back of governmental provision. In common with many analysts from these countries, I reject the term *developing countries* as a euphemism.

2. The concept of the "Other" refers to the idea prominent in the work of Simone de Beauvoir (1952) and elsewhere of a generalized and fictionalized foil to the dominant gen-der's characteristics. In this case, the "Other" is the colonized people.

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