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## 13 / *The Virtue of Feeling and the Feeling of Virtue*

ELIZABETH V. SPELMAN

The mother who taught me what I know of tenderness and love and compassion taught me also the bleak rituals of keeping Negroes in their place.

—Lillian Smith<sup>1</sup>

We cannot be said to have taken women seriously until we explore how women have treated each other. But that means, too, how we have mistreated each other. The history of women, including the history of feminism and feminists, is hardly free of some women doing violence to others, of some women miserably failing other women in need.

Most feminists would insist that the history of women cannot be well told unless its tellers are not embarrassed to investigate and describe women's emotional lives: our joys, our griefs, our hopes, our fears, our loves, our hates. But such insistence on the importance of feeling amounts simply to a ringing, one-sided celebration of women's virtues—in having emotions and recounting them—unless we are willing, as Lillian Smith was, to look at the expression of emotions among women that reveal the less glorious side of our lives together.

As is well documented, nineteenth-century white, middle-class suffragists were ready and willing to use racist arguments in the name of advancing what they called "women's interests."<sup>2</sup> Some white women routinely beat black women who were their slaves.<sup>3</sup> Nazi women gave their all in the effort to eliminate the Jewish population of Europe—which included, of course, Jewish women.<sup>4</sup> At an international conference on women's history not long ago in Amsterdam, the organizers were asked why what in the conference brochure was

referred to as "women's history" still really amounted to "white women's history." One of the white women responded: "We have enough of a burden trying to get a feminist viewpoint across, why do we have to take on this extra burden?"<sup>5</sup> At a recent feminist gathering in Minnesota, an able-bodied woman expressed her deep disappointment at the complaints by women in wheelchairs that all the papers presumed that women are able-bodied: in effect she said, "Here we finally have some time and space to talk about just 'us,' and you insist that we talk about something else." Can we be confident that women who demand the strictest scrutiny of the conditions under which they work and of the fairness of their salaries show the same concern for the working conditions of the women who take care of their children or clean their condos?

I do not wish to suggest here that white, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual Christian women have a monopoly on the mistreatment of other women. And by using these examples rather than others, I run the risk of making the sins of some women more important than those of others and thereby simply reasserting the privileged position of certain women in Western feminism. But it is startling that something as basic as some women's inhumanity to other women has not been a central concern for the variety of inquiries included under the rubric "feminist ethics." We give lots of attention to men's oppression of women but far too few sustained examinations of women's oppression or exploitation of other women.<sup>6</sup> As Berenice Fisher put it, when commenting on the growing use of "guilt" at feminist conferences: "Although we frequently employed the language of 'guilt,' virtually no one paid attention to guilt as a moral issue, that is, to the realities of wrongdoing and the responsibilities and consequences entailed by it."<sup>7</sup> I want to offer a few reasons in brief for this virtual silence and then suggest a way we might explore the moral dimensions of women's treatment and mistreatment of one another as at least a necessary part of whatever we include under the rubric "feminist ethics."

Why has the question of women's treatment of each other not been a burning issue for much of feminism? First of all, one of the bad raps about themselves that many women have had to battle is the image that they are catty and callous toward each other, really interested

only in men and their money or their prestige or their bodies or in some cases all of those. So perhaps it has seemed hard to make a publicly understandable feminist case about the oppression of women without simultaneously remaining mute on the topic of some women's oppression of or plain meanness toward other women. According to this way of thinking, it is, to begin with, too difficult psychologically to talk about oneself or other women as both victim and victimizer. For example, perhaps it is not easy to feel sympathy for the abused wives of white slave-owners and at the same time be critical of some of their actions toward their female (and male) slaves. Moreover, under such circumstances it is awfully inviting to lay the blame for our own or others' shortcomings at the feet of those who have victimized us or them. But however we might explain the reluctance or caution about discussing women's bad treatment of other women, taking those groups of women seriously requires that we do so.

There aren't only psychological motives for shying away from examining women's mistreatment of one another. Many of the tools of feminist thinking work against the possibility of our taking to be of much theoretical or practical concern the absence of care or the presence of hostility, hatred, and contempt among women.

First of all, many of us feminists have done little to shake a habit we share with many of our fellow citizens: talking loosely about "men and women" as if these men and women had no racial, class, or cultural identity; talking about "women and blacks" or "women and minorities" as if there were no black women or no women in the groups called "minorities"; comparing relations between "men and women" to those between "whites and blacks" or "rich and poor" or "colonizer and colonized," which precludes us from talking about differences among women—between white and black, or Anglo and Latina, or rich and poor, or colonizer and colonized. In addition, much feminist theory and history is filled with incessant comparisons between "women" on the one hand and "blacks," the "poor," "Jews," and so on, on the other. Think for example of talk about "women" being treated like "slaves." Whenever we talk that way we are not only making clear that the "women" we're referring to aren't themselves slaves; we're making it impossible to talk about how the women who weren't slaves treated those who were.

If we aren't encouraged to talk about differences among women,

indeed prohibited from doing so by the very terms we use or the allegedly crucial comparisons we make, then it becomes very hard, or apparently only peripheral to our central concerns, to talk about how women treat each other. But *that*, it seems to me, is what feminist ethics ought to be about, whatever else it might be about: how women treat each other. For again we must ask whether we can be said to have taken women seriously if we have not explored how women have treated each other.

Moreover, the effort by some feminists to delineate an "ethics of care,"<sup>8</sup> as well as the struggle to get the role of emotions in human life taken seriously, paradoxically (but perhaps not so accidentally) has diverted our attention from the history of the lack of care of women for women and has almost precluded the possibility of our looking at anything but love and friendship in women's emotional responses to one another. Some passages from Jane Austen's *Emma* illustrate what I have in mind. )

Emma, our lively young protagonist, is deep in a debate with Mr. George Knightley about the behavior of Frank Churchill. Young Churchill did not grow up with his father and stepmother, who are part of Emma and Knightley's social circle. A visit by Churchill to his father and stepmother has been long awaited: Emma and Knightley disagree in their assessment of Churchill's delay in making the trip:

KNIGHTLEY: "I cannot believe that he has not the power of coming, if he made a point of it. It is too unlikely for me to believe it without proof. . . . If Frank Churchill had wanted to see his father, he would have contrived it between September and January. A man at his age—what is he? three or four-and-twenty—cannot be without the means of doing as much as that. It is impossible."

EMMA: "You are the worst judge in the world, Mr. Knightley, of the difficulties of dependence. You do not know what it is to have tempers to manage. . . . It is very unfair to judge of anybody's conduct without an intimate knowledge of their situation. Nobody, who has not been in the interior of a family, can say what the difficulties of any individual of that family may be."

KNIGHTLEY: "There is one thing, Emma, which a man can always do, if he chooses, and that is, his duty. . . . It is Frank Churchill's duty to pay this attention to his father."

EMMA: ". . . you have not an idea of what is requisite in situations directly opposite to your own. . . . I can imagine that if you, as you are . . . were to be transported and placed all at once in Mr. Frank Churchill's situation, you would be able to say and do just what you have been recommending for him; and it might have a very good effect . . . but then you would have no habits of early obedience and long observance to break through. To him who has, it might not be so easy to burst forth at once into perfect independence. . . . Oh, the difference of situation and habit! I wish you would try to understand what an amiable young man may be likely to feel in directly opposing [the other adults who had brought him up]."

KNIGHTLEY: "Your amiable young man is a very weak young man, if this be the first occasion of his carrying through a resolution to do right against the will of others. It ought to have been a habit with him, by this time, of following his duty, instead of consulting expediency."

EMMA: "We are both prejudiced! you against, I for him; and we have no chance of agreeing till he is really here."

KNIGHTLEY: "Prejudiced! I am not prejudiced."

EMMA: "But I am very much, and without being at all ashamed of it. My love for [his father and stepmother] gives me a decided prejudice in his favour."<sup>9</sup>

I think anyone interested in the work of Carol Gilligan and those influenced by her work would find the contrasts between Knightley's and Emma's judgments about Frank Churchill to be at least on the face of it illustrative of two conceptions of morality that seem to be quite distinct.<sup>10</sup>

Knightley's concern for principled behavior, impartial judgment, and everyone's getting their due seems to exemplify an "ethics of justice" (said to be more likely held by men than women). For Knightley, there are at least two principles that ought to be brought to bear: the duty Churchill has to his father and the importance of Knightley himself remaining unbiased in his judgment of Churchill. Whatever relationship Churchill has to his more immediate family, that can't be as important as his duty to his own father; whatever the particular facts of the circumstances Churchill finds himself in, such

facts cannot be used by Churchill, or by anyone else, to mitigate the full weight of his duty.

Emma's insistence on the contextual details of the situation and her concern for the importance of the many relationships involved (Churchill and his immediate family, Churchill and his father and stepmother, Emma and Churchill, Emma and Knightley) seem characteristic of an "ethics of care" (said to be more likely held by women than men). For Emma, Churchill's formal "duty" here is irrelevant. And Emma's relationship to both Churchill and his father cannot be erased by some formal obligation she might be said to have to remain "unprejudiced." Knightley's principled judgment of Churchill is not well grounded: He doesn't know enough about what Churchill is capable of or about the crucial details of Churchill's relationship to his immediate family.

I do not here wish to enter into the ongoing and very rich conversation about such apparently contrasting ethical orientations.<sup>11</sup> Instead, I feel obliged to point out what readers may miss about Emma if they are interested in her only to the degree that her words and actions illustrate an "ethics of care" in contrast to an "ethics of justice."

In the chapter immediately following the one in which we overhear the animated discussion between Emma and Knightley, Emma and her friend Harriet are out for a walk. Jane Austen invites us to eavesdrop again, this time on Emma's private thoughts:

They were just approaching the house where lived Mrs. and Miss Bates. . . . There was always sufficient reason for [calling upon them]; Mrs. and Miss Bates loved to be called on; and [Emma] knew she was considered by the very few who presumed ever to see imperfection in her, as rather negligent in that respect, and as not contributing what she ought to the stock of their scanty comforts.

She had had many a hint from Mr. Knightley, and some from her own heart, as to her deficiency, but none were equal to counteract the persuasion of its being very disagreeable—a waste of time—tiresome women—and all the horror of being in danger of falling in with the second and third rate of Highbury, who were calling on them for ever, and therefore she seldom went near them.<sup>12</sup>

If we get thoroughly caught up in comparing Emma's unapologetically biased, very particularized caring for Frank Churchill with Knightley's rather stern, impersonal principled response, we may fail to ask a very important question: But for whom does Emma care? What kind of treatment does she give those she regards as her social and economic inferiors? The fact, if it is one, that some women in reflecting on their moral problems show care and a fine sense of complexity appreciative of context tells us nothing about *who* they think worthy of their care nor whose situation demands attention to details and whose does not.

Moreover, there are forms of care that are not only compatible with but in some contexts crucial to the maintenance of systematic inequalities among women. Judith Rollins describes in some detail the "maternalism" expressed by white female employers towards their black female domestic employees:

The maternalism dynamic is based on the assumption of a superordinate-subordinate relationship. While maternalism may protect and nurture, it also degrades and insults. The "caring" that is expressed in maternalism might range from an adult-to-child to a human-to-pet kind of caring but, by definition (and by the evidence presented by my data), it is not human-to-equal-human caring. The female employer, with her motherliness and protectiveness and generosity, is expressing in a distinctly feminine way her lack of respect for the domestic as an autonomous, adult employee. While the female employer typically creates a more intimate relationship with a domestic than her male counterpart does, this should not be interpreted as meaning she values the human worth of the domestic any more highly than does the more impersonal male employer.<sup>13</sup>

I have said in effect that by my lights one of the most fruitful understandings of "feminist ethics" is the investigation of how women treat each other—how well or badly we do in relation to one another. I have also said that feminist interest in exploring an "ethics of care" and in emphasizing the importance of emotions in our lives paradoxically has encouraged us to *ignore* the absence of care by women for other women, to *disregard* the presence of "negative"

emotional reactions by women to other women. I now want to make my remarks much more specific by focusing on the ways in which our emotions reveal the moral dimensions of our relationships—in particular, how our emotions reveal how seriously we take the concerns of others, what we take to be our responsibility for others' plight, and the extent to which we regard others as even having points of view we need to take seriously.

Our emotions, or at least some of them, can be highly revelatory of whom and what we care or don't care about. They provide powerful clues to the ways in which we take ourselves to be implicated in the lives of others and they in ours. As this example from Aristotle reveals, many of our emotions locate us in moral relation to one another: One who doesn't get angry when the occasion calls for it "is thought not to feel things nor to be pained by them, and since he does not get angry, he is thought unlikely to defend himself, and to endure being insulted, and put up with insult to one's friends, is slavish."<sup>14</sup> Aristotle is insisting that if under certain conditions we don't feel anger, we may have failed to show proper respect for ourselves or proper concern for our friends.

Here is another example of what I have in mind when speaking of our emotions as revelatory of ways in which we take ourselves to be implicated in the lives of others and they in ours. At my own educational institution and many others, there have been blatant displays of racism—for example, messages left by cowards in protective anonymity—telling black, Latina, and Chinese-American students in no uncertain terms that they don't belong at Smith College and that if they don't like the way they're treated, they should "go home." (These represent only the obvious tip of an iceberg that is melting with what the Supreme Court in a related context called "all deliberate speed.") I do not wish to go into details of how my institution or yours actually has responded to what, in a revealing phrase, typically are called "incidents" (a term that suggests, perhaps insists, that such events are infrequent and anomalous). But by way of beginning to show what our emotions tell us about our moral relations to each other and the contours and quality of our care for one another, I'd like to run through some possible responses.

1. Ivyln College regrets the occurrence of racist incidents on its campus.
2. Ivyln College is embarrassed by the occurrence of racist incidents on its campus.
3. Ivyln College feels guilty about the occurrence of racist incidents on its campus.
4. Ivyln College feels shame for the occurrence of racist incidents on its campus.<sup>15</sup>

Surely you already notice some significant difference—yet to be explored in detail—between regret, embarrassment, guilt, and shame. Think also of the difference between

5. Ivyln College regrets the occurrence of racist incidents on its campus.
6. Ivyln College regrets the harm done to those hurt by the recent events on its campus.

If the first set of contrasts reminds us that different emotions imply different notions of responsibility and depth of concern, the second reminds us that the same emotion can have different objects—what the emotions are about. In going into all these differences in more detail, I turn to Gabriele Taylor's *Pride, Shame, and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment*.<sup>16</sup>

Gabriele Taylor is one of a number of contemporary philosophers who hold or operate on the basis of what has been dubbed the "cognitive theory" of the emotions. Though cognitivists differ among each other on certain details, they share the conviction that emotions cannot simply be feelings, like churnings in our stomachs, flutterings of our hearts, chokings in our throats. Though such feelings may accompany my regretting having hurt you or my sense of shame in having hurt you, the difference between my regret and my shame cannot be accounted for by reference to such feelings; nor can the difference between my regret in having hurt *you* and my regret in having hurt *my father*. There is a kind of logic to our emotions that has nothing to do with whatever dumb feelings may accompany them (in many cases there don't even seem to be such feelings anyway).

It is the central tenet of what is currently known as the "cognitive

theory" of emotions that our emotions are not a clue to or sign of poppings and firings and other gyrations—mental or physical—within us but rather indicate how we see the world. For emotions typically have identificatory cognitive states. For example, what identifies my emotion as *anger* is among other things a belief that some unjust harm has been done; what makes my emotion a matter of *fear* is among other things my belief that danger is imminent. I shall not go into more detail about the cognitive theory here—you shall see more of it in reflective practice below—but it is perhaps worth making explicit that we could not regard our emotions as very interesting facts about us—in particular, as deeply connected to ourselves as moral agents—if emotions were simply events, things happening in us like headaches or bleeding gums.<sup>17</sup>

That said, let us return to our earlier examples of regret, embarrassment, guilt, and shame. As Gabriele Taylor reminds us, if I regret that something happened, then I must regard what happened as in some sense undesirable. But I need not regard what happened as anything morally troubling—for example, I may now regret not taking a few more days of vacation. Or I can feel regret for something for which I was in no way responsible—Gabriele Taylor's example is the passing of summer.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, even though regretting that something happened means I must take it to be in some sense undesirable, it is still possible for me to think that nevertheless all things considered it is not something I think should not have happened. And it is perfectly possible for me to regret it without being at all inclined to take any actions in consequence. This is why we can perfectly sincerely send our regrets—indeed, even our "deepest regrets"—that a party occurs on a night we're out of town. It might have been fun to go to the party, and I might be a bit apprehensive about hurting the feelings of or disappointing a good friend, but it is more important to do what takes me out of town and I don't want my friend to change the date of the party. In all these ways, Gabriele Taylor points out, regret is quite different from remorse. You can't feel remorse about something for which you do not believe yourself responsible, or about something that doesn't appear to you to be morally wrong, or about something you don't wish to undo or attend to in some way.

So if Ivyln College or any other institution expresses *regret* that a "racist incident" happened on its campus, all it is doing so far is acknowledging that such an event took place and allowing that it was

in some unspecified sense undesirable. But it is not in any way assuming responsibility for the "incident" or indicating that there is anything morally troubling about it (as opposed to its just being undesirable for its nuisance value in terms of college publicity); nor is it indicating that any action is in consequence required. Note, by the way, that precisely because regret has these features, there are certain built-in limitations on the description of *what* is regretted: Though it is perfectly possible to "regret" something described as a "racist incident," I'm sure no institution would publicly say that it "regretted" the murder of one student by another.

Having sketched out what the presence of regret means, we can keep on the back burner what the absence of it means—that is, not acknowledging that anything of note happened at all, let alone that it was in some way undesirable.

I shall then, without regret, move on to *embarrassment*. My guess is that most institutions are embarrassed by the occurrence of racism on their campuses, but they would not describe themselves in just that way. The reasons for this will become clear as we look at the logic of embarrassment (here again with Gabriele Taylor's help). Unlike regret, embarrassment necessarily involves a sense that one has been exposed and in consequence is subject to an adverse judgment of oneself in some respect. Suppose a man is embarrassed about beating his wife. His being embarrassed is fully compatible with his finding nothing wrong in the fact that he beats his wife. He judges himself adversely not because he thinks he has done something wrong but because he does not yet know how to respond to the audience to whom he is or imagines himself exposed. If all he feels is embarrassed, he doesn't need to do any basic repair work on himself, only figure out a way to deal with the audience—perhaps tell them it is none of their business, or insist that women need to be pushed around, or laugh it off. Perhaps he'll express regret that it is necessary to beat his wife in order to keep her in her place (so the expression of regret might cancel embarrassment). His concern is not about what he is doing to his wife but about the kind of impression he is making on others.

What then does it mean if Ivyln College is *embarrassed* by the racist incidents on its campus—and why might it or any other institution be unlikely to publicly describe itself in this way? If an institution is embarrassed by the occurrence of racist remarks and

other behavior, then what it finds troubling is not the behavior itself but the exposure of the behavior. If there is anything wrong with the institution, it is that it does not know how to prevent adverse publicity or deal well with it once public notice is taken. When an institution is embarrassed, and only embarrassed, it puts its public relations department to work; it works not on changing the institution but on changing the perception of the institution. Admitting to embarrassment is usually not a good way of dealing with embarrassment, for it simply brings attention to the situation that the embarrassed party does not want others to see.

You can feel *embarrassed* without thinking that you have done anything wrong or anything you shouldn't do, but in general<sup>19</sup> you can't feel *guilty* without believing that you have failed to live up to some kind of standard or that you have done something that is forbidden according to an accepted authority (including your conscience). (Of course you can be guilty without feeling guilty, but here we are talking only about feeling guilty). There is something I have done or failed to do. According to Gabriele Taylor, in feeling guilt I certainly am judging myself adversely, but my situation is not hopeless—I am not less of a person than I thought I was. I simply did something I think I shouldn't have done or failed to do something I think I ought to have done. There is a blot on my record—but then blots only are blots against the background of an otherwise still morally intact person. That is connected to the fact that there are things I can do to repair the damage I've done. Indeed, the action I take is geared to restoring the blot-free picture of myself—so, Gabriele Taylor insists, if I feel guilty about harming someone else, the thought is not so much that "I have harmed *her*" but rather "I have harmed *her*"<sup>20</sup> and hence disfigured myself to some extent. In response, I may want to do something about the harm I did to her but—to the extent that my concern is more about myself than about her—as a means of restoring my status in my own eyes.

Gabriele Taylor's analysis, then, implies that the man who beats his wife and feels guilty about it, unlike the man who merely feels embarrassed, does believe that he has done something he ought not to do, and feeling this way he is inclined to take action to alleviate the feeling of guilt. But his concern is not directly for his wife but for himself. If her pain is the occasion for his thinking he has violated something he stands for, his ceasing to beat her or his otherwise atoning for what he has done is the means to his self-rehabilitation.

Could Ivyln College feel *guilty* about the racism on its campus? Of course this sounds odd—in a way that ascribing regret to the institution does not. This seems related to the fact that feeling guilty involves a sense of direct responsibility for the deed, so that to ascribe feelings of guilt to an institution really amounts to ascribing it to particular individuals within the institution. Institutions can have regret precisely because regrets don't entail responsibility and where there is responsibility we look for particular agents. The president of Ivyln College, for example, could talk about the college's having regrets without implying that she herself has them, but it would take a lot of work for her to say that the college feels guilty about something without giving the impression that she was talking about herself or other highly placed officials. It certainly is possible that there might be reports of various officials feeling "very bad" about what went on—not simply embarrassed, much more than regretful. Insofar as this means something like "feeling guilty," then if Gabriele Taylor is right such officials believe that while nothing is basically wrong with the institution or with them, they or the institution bear responsibility for the racist events. The emphasis in any action will be on redeeming the good name of the institution and attending to the hurt done the injured parties as the means to redeeming the good name of the institution.

Let us go on to *shame*. Suppose the man who beats his wife feels shame for doing so. How is that different from his feeling embarrassed or guilty? According to Gabriele Taylor,<sup>21</sup> the identificatory belief in shame is that I am not the person I thought I was or hoped I might be. It is not simply, as in embarrassment, that I wish I hadn't been seen doing something (even though I don't think I've done anything wrong) or, as in guilt, simply that I have failed to live up to a standard I adhere to. If I thought the latter, I could still entertain the possibility that I can set the record straight, for in such a case what troubles me about what I've done is quite local: I've *done* something I don't approve of, but I'm not *someone* I don't approve of. As Gabriele Taylor puts it: "When feeling guilty . . . the view I take of myself is entirely different from the view I take of myself when feeling shame: in the latter case I see myself as being all of a piece, what I have just done, I now see, fits only too well what I really am. But when feeling guilty I think of myself as having brought about a forbidden state of affairs and thereby in this respect disfigured a self which otherwise remains the same."<sup>22</sup> So if Mr. Husband feels shame about beating his wife, he must think that his

action is revelatory of the person he in fact is even though he had thought or hoped that he was someone else, someone better than he turns out to be.

And thus if Iyylawn College should feel shame about the racism existing on its campus,<sup>23</sup> it would indicate that the college or the people identified as its representatives thought it wasn't the institution it hoped it was. The racism on the campus is revelatory of what the institution really is and not simply a sign that the college can't always live up to what it says it stands for.

Perhaps that is why an institution is unlikely to feel or admit to shame: It may be unable to countenance the possibility that at root it is not what it purports, even to itself, to be.

So, then, our emotions, or at least some of them, can be highly revelatory of who and what we care or don't care about. They provide powerful clues to the ways in which we take ourselves to be implicated in the lives of others and they in ours. And their *absence* provides such clues as much as their presence does. For example, the conference organizers referred to at the beginning of this chapter who were asked why no women of color were included in a gathering on "women's history" seemed to have no regrets about their decision, let alone embarrassment, guilt, or shame. From their vantage point, there was nothing undesirable about the focus of the conference, and though not in any way disclaiming responsibility for that focus, they made no room for the implication that they had done anything wrong or that the conference or they weren't what they understood it or themselves to be. Indeed, from the remarks quoted earlier, it appears that they began to argue that the complaints and demands of the women of color were groundless: The conference was about "women," not about race. And if anything, there is a strong note of annoyance in the remarks of the woman who insisted that talking about race was an "extra burden" for feminism and that the women of color were both missing the point and adding to the load already carried by the conveners.

Let us suppose that as a convener I come to feel regret as a result of listening to the comments of the women of color. What would that show about what I care about and how I take myself to be implicated in the lives of others and others in mine? Well, that depends of course

on *what* I regret. Do I regret having hurt the women of color? Having been made uncomfortable myself? That my theory turns out not to be adequate? In this connection María Lugones recently noted that in her experience many feminists, when asked to explain how their accounts of "women's experiences" apply to women of color, express considerable concern about the inadequacy of their theories—but the focus of concern, María Lugones reluctantly concludes, is not how they have hurt women of color but rather that they need to tidy up their theories.<sup>24</sup>

It is not news that white feminist conferences and conversations have been peppered, sometimes even smothered, with expressions of guilt—sometimes in reaction to the very lack of regret (or perhaps some other emotion) for the exclusionary practices and policies I have described.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, a great deal has been made of white women's feelings of *guilt* in the face of charges by black women, Latinas, Japanese-American women, and others that our theories have been heavily tilted in the direction and to the exclusive benefit of white, middle-class women. Reflection on Gabriele Taylor's work leads me to make three comments about the discussions about this guilt. First, if Gabriele Taylor is right about the point of action taken to get rid of the feeling of guilt, then guilt is not an emotion that makes us attend well to the situation of those whose treatment at our hands we feel guilty about. We're too anxious trying to keep our moral slate clean. Second, I think it worth asking whether in any given case people are feeling guilt or simply embarrassment. If the latter, then there is no sense that one has failed in any way to act in accordance with what one stands for. There are no amends to make, only appearances to create.

Third, I think that there is a very neat fit between feeling guilty and a particular way of conceiving the relation between one's gender and one's racial identity. This friendly cohabitation throws some very interesting light on the concept of "white guilt." According to Gabriele Taylor, in feeling guilt rather than shame, it is possible for me to think of a part of myself as not living up to what the rest of me stands for. Insofar as I see myself as a "doer of a wicked deed," I see the hint of an alien self; in order to make sure such a self does not emerge, I need to do whatever it takes to "purge" myself of this alien self.<sup>26</sup> If I have a metaphysical position according to which my gender identity is thoroughly distinct from my racial identity (what I elsewhere call a form

of "Tootsie Roll metaphysics")<sup>27</sup> I very handily can rely on a neat distinction between myself as woman and myself as white person. The woman part of me is perfectly okay; it's being white that is the source of my wrongdoing. I assert my privilege over women of color not insofar as I am a woman but insofar as I am white. Note then that unless I am prepared to think of my womanness and my whiteness as folded inextricably into the person I am, I can think of myself and my responsibility for my acts in the following way: What really counts about me is that I am a woman, and my deeds do not show that I am not any less of a woman than I thought I was; it's only insofar as I am white, which isn't nearly as important a part of me, that I have failed other women. It's not the woman in me that failed the woman in you; it's the white in me that failed (for example) the black in you. I, woman, feel nothing in particular; but I, white person, do feel guilt. If feminism focuses on the "woman" part of me and the "woman" part of you, conceived of as thoroughly distinct from my white part and your black part, feminism doesn't have to pay attention to our relations as white and black. We never have to confront each other woman to woman, then, only white to black or Anglo to Latina.

Feminist ethics, I have been insisting, must at least address the history of woman's inhumanity to woman. This part of the history of women is shameful. However, I am not proposing a daily regimen of shame-inducing exercises. Nor do I think that the deep self-doubt that is part of shame can serve as the immediate ground of a vibrant feminist politics, a politics that expresses and promotes real care and concern for all women's lives. But I do not see how women who enjoy privileged status over other women (whether it be based on race, class, religion, age, sexual orientation, or physical mobility) can come to think it desirable to lose that privilege (by force or consent) unless they see it not only as producing harm to other women but also as being deeply disfiguring to themselves. It is not simply, as it would be in the case of guilt, that the point of ceasing to harm others is to remove a disquieting blot from one's picture of oneself. The deeper privilege goes, the less self-conscious people are of the extent to which their being who they are, in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of others, is dependent upon the exploitation or degradation or disadvantage of others. Seeing myself as deeply disfigured by privilege

and desiring to do something about it may be impossible without my feeling shame. The degree to which I am moved to undermine systems of privilege is closely tied to the degree to which I feel shame at the sort of person such privilege makes me or allows me to be.

In sum, then, I have been urging these considerations to keep those of us who are feminists from hastening to quickly to feel virtuous about attending to the virtues of feeling, the marvel of care. Whatever we mean by "feminist ethics," it ought not to make it difficult for us to examine and evaluate how women treat or mistreat each other. However, there are elements in feminism that make such examination difficult. For example, there is a tendency to focus on the contrast between an "ethics of care" and ethical systems that seem not to take care seriously. So far the contrast tells us nothing about who cares or does not care for whom. Moreover, since it has been claimed that an ethics of care is associated strongly though not exclusively with the way "women" think and act in the moral domain, it makes it very hard even to suggest that some women have failed to care for others, let alone that they have done violence to others. There is also a reliance on an understanding of care that obscures the fact that some forms of care are not only compatible with but crucial to the maintenance of systematic inequalities among women. In this connection, Judith Rollins's book about relations between white female employers and their black domestic employees is very insightful.<sup>28</sup> Among other things, Judith Rollins describes ways in which the employers insist on the privilege of "caring" for their employees in ways that reflect and sustain their power over them. Finally, there is a rampant terminology of contrasts between "women" on the one hand and "slaves" or "minorities" or "the poor" or "Jews" or whatever on the other. Such contrasts (and for that matter similarities) obscure differences between free women and slave women, gentile women and Jewish women, and so on, making it hard to talk about how one group of women treated others. This is reinforced by theories within feminism according to which women are the same *as women* and are oppressed the same *as women* and so if white women mistreat, say, black women, it is seen as how whites treat blacks, not how some women treat other women.

I have proposed one way of looking at some of the moral dimen-

sions of women's treatment of one another. Some emotions are called "moral emotions" because having them involves or can involve moral assessment of oneself and others. In Gabriele Taylor's words, a moral emotion "requires a sense of value on the part of the agent, an awareness, more or less developed, of moral distinctions, of what is right or wrong, honorable or disgraceful."<sup>29</sup> Our having such emotions toward others can reveal whether, how, and to what extent we have treated them or think we have treated them well or poorly—so does our not having them. Moreover, our political and metaphysical theories give shape and structure to our emotional lives. For example, our assumptions about what *feminism* is about will influence our beliefs about what is appropriate and inappropriate to bring up at feminist conferences, which will in turn influence the possibility of our feeling anger, regret, remorse, embarrassment, guilt, or shame. (As Arnold Isenberg says: "When you lack what you do not want, there is no shame."<sup>30</sup>) And as I stated earlier, assumptions about the relation between our gender identity and other aspects of our identity such as our race, class, and religion can influence how we describe our responsibility for the way we treat other women.

## NOTES

1. Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream* (New York: Norton, 1949, 1961), 27.
2. See, for example, Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), especially chap. 13; Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978); Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Random, 1981); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Morrow, 1984).
3. See, for example, Linda Brent, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. L. Maria Child (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973); Solomon Northrup, *Narrative of Solomon Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave* (Auburn, N.Y.: Derby and Miller, 1853), quoted in Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America* (New York: Vintage, 1972), 51.
4. See, for example, Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).
5. *off our backs* (feminist newspaper), July 1986, 3.
6. See notes 1–5 above; also, for example, bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); Audre Lorde, *Sister/Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1984); Helen Longino and Valerie Miner, eds., *Competition: A Feminist*

*Taboo?* (New York: Feminist Press, 1987); Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith, *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1984). Simone de Beauvoir, by the way, had quite a lot to say about women with race and class privilege undermining or failing to support other women in order to maintain their race and class privilege, but that part of her work is rarely highlighted—even by herself [see Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), chap. 3].

7. Berenice Fisher, "Guilt and Shame in the Women's Movement: The Radical Ideal of Action and Its Meaning for Feminist Intellectuals," *Feminist Studies* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 186.

8. See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds., *Women and Moral Theory* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987).

9. Jane Austen, *Emma* (New York: Bantam, 1981, first edition, 1816), 133–139.

10. These are not incompatible conceptions, according to Gilligan and others. See Eva Kittay and Diana Meyers, eds., *Women and Moral Theory*.

11. See, for example, *ibid.*, Lawrence A. Blum, "Gilligan and Kohlberg: Implications for Moral Theory," *Ethics* 98 (April 1988): 472–491.

12. Jane Austen, *Emma*, 139–140.

13. Judith Rollins, *Between Women: Domesticity and Their Employers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 186.

14. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, tr. Sir David Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 97.

15. Two problems emerge here, even in the presentation of 1–4: One is what it means for institutions, as opposed to individuals, to have such reactions; and the other is that as long as we focus on institutions, we don't have to think about what our own reactions are. But we'll get to these below.

16. Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

17. See Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Anger and Insubordination," in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality*, ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (Winchester, Mass.: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 263–273.

18. Although regretting that something happened differs in some important ways from regretting having done something—since the latter, not the former, entails responsibility for having done the thing in question—I can fully regret that something happened without in any way implicating myself in having brought it about.

19. In "Cognitive Emotions?" Chesire Calhoun discusses the repair work necessary for certain versions of the cognitive theory in light of the fact that sometimes "one's doxic life and one's emotional life part company" (in *What is an Emotion? Classic Readings in Philosophical Psychology*, ed. Chesire Calhoun and Robert C. Solomon [New York: Oxford University Press, 1984], 333).

20. Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt*, 92.

21. *Ibid.*, 68.

22. *Ibid.*, 92.

23. Note how odd it would be to refer to that about which one feels shame as merely an "incident."

24. See chapter 2 of this volume.

25. It may seem as if this is at odds with my claim at the beginning of the chapter that the history of hostile or uncaring relationships among women has not gotten the sustained attention it deserves. But passing, even frequent, expressions of regret, embarrassment, guilt, or shame are hardly the same as a thorough examination of the meanings of those emotions in the history of the social and political relationships among women.

26. Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt*, 134, 135.

27. See Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, passim.

28. Judith Rollins, *Between Women*, passim.

29. Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt*, 107.

30. Arnold Isenberg, "Natural Shame and Natural Pride," in *Explaining Emotions*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 370.

## 14 / Whom Can Women Trust?

ANNETTE C. BAIER

"But though the males, when united, have in all countries bodily force sufficient to maintain this severe tyranny, yet such are the insinuation, address and charms of their fair companions that women are commonly able to break the confederacy, and share with the other sex in all the rights and privileges of society."<sup>1</sup> For years, decades even, I referred to this claim of Hume's as a claim about women's power to break male confederacies. It took a male reader of the passage, Chris Williams, to point out to me that Hume does not say that the confederacy to be broken is one of males only. Males are those accused of tyranny over women in many societies, but the confederacy that supports the tyranny that needs to be broken may not be an exclusively male one, indeed has not been an exclusively male one. Women must distrust not only the men who have the bodily force to maintain severe tyrannies but also the women whose insinuation, address, and charms are used to keep in favor with the tyrants, to help maintain rather than to break the confederacy that, in the extreme case, reduces women to slavery "incapable of all property, in opposition to their lordly masters."

Not only is this a pretty obvious truth once it is pointed out, but it is indeed one that Hume explicitly draws attention to in the essays that he addressed particularly to the women of his time and culture. In "Of Love and Marriage," for example, he gently chides them for taking satires on the institution of matrimony to be satires on themselves. "Do they mean that they are the parties principally concerned, and that if a backwardness to enter into that state should prevail in the world, they would be the greatest sufferers?"<sup>2</sup> Then there is his "pretty remarkable instance of a philosophic spirit," the young woman who, "observing the many unhappy marriages among her