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Solidarity as Social Transformation:
Towards a Queer Humanism

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Solidarity as Social Transformation: Towards a Queer Humanism

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M.A., Emory University, 2007
B.A., Boston College, 2003

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Emory University
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ABSTRACT

Solidarity as Social Transformation: Towards a Queer Humanism
By Erin Regina Helfrich

A philosophical dilemma lies at the heart of contemporary human rights scholarship: any account of human rights must make claims about the attributes human beings share universally, and yet the variety of human culture and experience persistently undermines such universal claims. One of the most prominent and widely-accepted responses to this philosophical dilemma has been to advocate the virtue of "tolerance" for diverse others. Subsequent debates over human rights and toleration of difference crystallize into two central questions: what are the minimum necessary conditions for a dignified human life and how can we negotiate conflicting claims about what these conditions are?

My project approaches these questions through the concept of *solidarity*—an ethical relation that mediates between the individual and the community, involving some form of unity. I give an account of the practice of "ethical solidarity" as a virtuous interpersonal relation toward others, one in which each individual is predisposed to act in support of other individuals' human flourishing. On my view, the traditional philosophical focus in human rights discourse on creating just institutions is insufficient to secure the minimum necessary conditions for flourishing human lives for all. Because social and cultural structures of power only sanction and support a narrow understanding of "normal" lives, those whose lives fall outside the norm are subject to daily acts of denigration, discrimination, alienation, and both psychic and physical violence.

Therefore, an account is needed of the interpersonal interactions, responsibilities, and ethical relations that support human dignity and flourishing.

Rather than embracing mere tolerance of human difference, the minimum necessary conditions for a flourishing human life are best achieved through the practice of ethical solidarity. I conclude by proposing a utopian notion of "queer humanism" that opposes narrow norms through the concrete multiplication of our imaginative conception of "the human." "The human" is a *telos* which is never fully defined or realized; it is articulated within imaginative social practice, not prior to social and political practice.

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CHAPTER 1

BEING HUMAN

If the human is anything, it seems to be a double movement, one in which we assert moral norms at the same time as we question the authority by which we make that assertion.

Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*

In a moment where many scholars, particularly those in feminist or queer theory, are turning to the idea that we are in or are approaching a "post-human" era, what would it mean to rethink the human? What value might "the human" retain in theoretical or practical terms for work that makes its aim the alleviation of oppression? My goal in this dissertation is to suggest one mode of retrieval of the concept of "the human"—a retrieval which I arrive at by investigating two distinct communities of intellectual inquiry: liberal humanists and queer and feminist postmodern theorists. I look to these two groups in particular because I see work in both as making significant and meaningful contributions to thought about "the human" in relation to the alleviation of oppression, but with respect to two distinct types of concerns.

Liberal humanists,[1] particularly those working in political philosophy, have lately been focusing on issues of human rights in a global context and attempting to give grounding philosophical accounts of the basis for political claims to a variety of particular rights. Such accounts tend to display a rather essentialist bent. That is, they tend to derive human rights claims on the basis of particular views of the nature of human personhood and what sorts of attributes constitute the essential aspects of human nature for all human beings. I understand the motivation for these essentializing accounts of

[1] I am thinking of figures such as Martha Nussbaum, Seyla Benhabib, and Charles Taylor.

human rights as deriving from the very philosophically-informed notion that a right which derives from an invariant human nature and set of needs is the most firmly (theoretically) secured or justified. Such accounts are also influenced by a preoccupation with issues of cultural relativism and the search for an overarching or underlying human continuity that would ground universal human rights claims regardless of cultural differences. The project of the theoretical *justification* of human rights, particularly in connection with the justification of certain forms of political affiliation or political intercourse, has taken a peculiarly central place in contemporary work on globalization and human rights.[2] That is, accounts of the justification of human rights claims are often accompanied by and viewed as informing particular claims about the best forms of political affiliation or intercourse, such as claims about the proper construction of just political institutions or just political discourse.

Queer theorists (and some feminist theorists) in the postmodern tradition have lately been moving away from "the human" precisely because it seems haunted by this essentializing tendency. These postmodern theorists are especially concerned with issues of oppression and marginalization and the way that essentialist notions of what is "normal" or "universal" for human beings have excluded and harmed particular groups on the basis of their gender, sex, gender expression, or sexual identity.[3] However, the cultural forces that are bringing liberal humanists to focus on human rights issues are having their effect on queer and feminist theory as well. The past few years have been notably marked by a "(re)turn to ethics," and ethical questions are increasingly finding

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[2] I am thinking here of work by theorists such as John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas, Gayatri Spivak, and Martha Nussbaum.

[3] Some forms of feminist and queer theory are also concerned with harms and exclusions perpetrated on the basis of other social characteristics—particularly race, but also class and ability.

their way into work in queer theory.[4] Rather than focus on "the human," these theorists are exploring the liberatory potential of concepts like "freedom."

My project over the course of this dissertation is to argue that "the human" can be a productive and powerful tool for liberatory rhetoric, politics, and ethics. Addressing myself to both liberal humanists and queer and feminist postmodern theorists, I hope to show that it is possible and desirable to give an account of human flourishing that speaks to concerns about human rights violations as well as to concerns about the harms of essentialism. In what follows in this chapter, I argue that a liberal humanist notion of "human flourishing" and a queer feminist postmodern notion of "livable life" are both crucial for an understanding of what is required for the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing.

It is my belief that the tension produced by bringing these two traditions into conversation with one another is a boon to this project rather than an obstacle. I utilize this productive tension throughout the dissertation as a two-pronged defense: against the calcifying tendency of any description of human flourishing—of what human beings are like and what they need to live good and happy lives—as well as against the tendency to retreat into vague, abstract, and mostly negative[5] theoretical responses to pressing practical problems. I view many of the contributions of queer theorists, for example, (Butler often makes these moves) as primarily critical and criticizing of others' theoretical positions. To take one example, Butler often makes much of the social conditions that allow for the emergence of subjectivity in the first place, very often from a psychoanalytic point of view, and while I find such critique eminently important, it

[4] I am thinking here of work by Judith Butler, Lynne Huffer, Lee Edelman, and Michael Warner.
[5] I use "negative" in the sense of mounting a critique, as opposed to constructing a positive account—not "negative" in the sense of pessimistic or disapproving.

does not aid us in constructing a positive, comprehensive response to the practical problems that constrain human flourishing after such subjects have already emerged.

I conclude this chapter by introducing what will be the central argument of this dissertation: that the notion of what is required for human flourishing generates ethical duties in relation to the virtues which are best fulfilled through the practice of ethical solidarity, in partnership with the effective functioning of just institutions. I wish to contribute to the growing conversation on the concept of solidarity in philosophical discourse; my project makes a unique contribution to the field by giving an account of how the practice of what I am calling "ethical solidarity" operates to transform both individuals and society in support of human flourishing for all. "Ethical solidarity" is an interpersonal relation towards others, one in which each individual (as a "solidary ally") is predisposed to act in support of other individuals' human dignity. (It is the project of the complete dissertation to give a robust account of what it means to practice ethical solidarity.) I argue that a focus on just institutions (in social and political philosophy especially) is insufficient to secure the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing and that an account of interpersonal interactions, responsibilities, and ethical relations is a necessary supplement. My account of ethical solidarity fulfills this necessary role. Throughout the dissertation, I will focus in particular on instances of ethical solidarity that relate to differences in sexual identity and gender expression. I choose this focus partly because it is a central part of much of the queer and feminist postmodern work I draw upon and partly because I see this area as under-theorized with regard to issues of solidarity.[6]

[6] In contrast, for example, issues of solidarity across racial differences have received extensive attention in feminist work, particularly from women of color. I draw upon this prior work on solidarity across racial

In order to put liberal humanism and queer feminist postmodern theory into productive conversation, I engage with two prominent yet strongly opposed scholars, Martha Nussbaum and Judith Butler. Both Nussbaum and Butler have published recent works on the theoretical and practical difficulties of defining the category of the human.[7] Butler approaches the problem from the tradition of postmodernism and continental philosophy, whereas Nussbaum analyzes it from the perspective of the history of philosophy and its Anglo-American incarnations. I choose to juxtapose these two theorists not only because they have been interpreted as adversarial to one another,[8] but because they are also representative of two distinctive (and arguably opposed) approaches to addressing the issue of who counts as human.

On the one hand, Nussbaum represents an approach that is centrally concerned with the international discourse of human rights and with issues of basic human needs (food, water, shelter, freedom of movement, etc.). On the other hand, Butler represents an approach that is centrally concerned with issues of normativity and social control, social hierarchy and privilege, and the oppressive hegemony of social norms. I argue that Nussbaum's understanding of "human flourishing" and Butler's discussion of what constitutes a "livable life" converge, surprisingly, around the issue of who counts as human—who is understood in practical terms, through social behaviors, to be a person possessing human dignity.

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differences as a fruitful source of insight for work on solidarity across sexual differences, particularly in Chapter 2.

[7] I focus in particular on Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007) and Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).

[8] See Martha C. Nussbaum, "The professor of parody," *The New Republic* 220, no. 8 (February 22, 1999): 37.

My argument begins by demonstrating the common concerns of both Butler and Nussbaum (and the varying approaches they represent) with regard to defining humanity. I then explain how their arguments converge on the necessity of a social basis for being "counted" as human. Butler and Nussbaum agree that all humans are deserving of respect. I argue that this respect must take the form of social and cultural recognition, the preservation of human rights, and a culture that supports human dignity for all persons. It will turn out that these concerns and projects are interdependent, precisely insofar as such respect involves the work of imagination.

Martha Nussbaum on Human Flourishing and the Capabilities Approach

In her recent book, *Frontiers of Justice* (2007), Martha Nussbaum advances an account of essential human capabilities that takes its launching point from a critique of traditional social contract theories of justice and the notion of personhood they employ. In particular, she focuses on John Rawls's theory of justice as fairness, a theory which she deeply admires but with which she also finds grave fault, insofar as it excludes certain populations from choosing the principles of justice. Nussbaum argues convincingly that one of the fundamental problems with social contract theories is that they "conflate the contract's framers with the primary subjects of justice."[9] The problem with this conflation is that the contract's framers are conceived of as "free, equal, and independent"[10] persons, but this description eliminates large swaths of humanity from

[9] Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 250.
[10] Ibid., chapter 1, part iv.

participating in framing the principles of justice, including, in particular, the physically and mentally disabled, the very poor, and in many contexts also women.

Furthermore, Nussbaum argues that the principles of justice chosen by the framers of the social contract are treated as applicable only to those who participate in drawing up the contract—that is, those with whom it is mutually advantageous to contract. Social contract theories presume that people get together for the purpose of mutual advantage, and therefore any person, such as the physically or mentally disabled, who is seen as not advantageous to contract with—not free, equal and independent—is excluded. The (unacceptable) result is that, first, large portions of the human population are excluded from choosing the principles of justice which would govern their society,[11] and second, since they were not party to the contract, fair treatment of this excluded population is not seen as a matter of justice, but rather one of *charity*.

As an alternative and corrective approach to the problem, Nussbaum offers what she calls the "capabilities approach," a human rights approach to political theory which is constructed on the basis of a desired outcome, rather than on the integrity of pure process.[12] Nussbaum claims that the capabilities approach "use[s] a political conception of the person that more closely reflects real life."[13] She asserts that all human beings possess an innate dignity and that the elements of this dignity are plural.[14] Nussbaum begins from "the Aristotelian/Marxian conception of the human being as a social and political being, who finds fulfillment in relations with others,"[15] and who understands

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[11] Not that it would be acceptable to exclude just a small portion of society; Nussbaum explicitly rejects such a Utilitarian approach.

[12] The emphasis on results rather than process is notably different from Rawls' approach.

[13] Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 87.
[14] Ibid., 84.
[15] Ibid., 85.

living in accord with justice as part of the good life—part of human flourishing.[16] On the basis of this understanding, Nussbaum elaborates a list of ten fundamental, essential human capabilities—life without which would be a life that is lacking in the most basic level of human flourishing. These capabilities are, briefly: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination, and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one's environment (both political and material).[17] Nussbaum views these capabilities as implicit in the intuitive idea of a life worthy of human dignity. The capabilities are presented as "the source of political principles for a liberal pluralistic society" and "can become the object of an overlapping consensus among people who otherwise have very different comprehensive conceptions of the good."[18] The capabilities thus serve as a philosophical underpinning to claims of political entitlement.

From the goal of assuring human dignity, the capabilities approach constructs the process and political infrastructure necessary to achieve its desired outcome. Nussbaum's process does *not* require that parties to the social contract be free, equal, and independent, nor does she assume that parties are contracting for the purpose of mutual advantage. Rather, the capabilities approach assumes that all contracting parties share the desire for the stated outcome—that all human beings are able to achieve an acceptable minimum of human dignity. Persons who cannot participate directly in the contracting process (for example, severely mentally disabled persons) are represented by a proxy who is to advocate for them when they are unable to do so for themselves.

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[16] Ibid., 86.
[17] Ibid., 76-8.
[18] Ibid., 70.

Nussbaum's capabilities approach aspires to open up the possibility that all human persons can live a minimally dignified, and therefore *flourishing*, human life. The capabilities approach attempts to leave "space for diverse possibilities of flourishing."[19] Nussbaum claims that her approach avoids dictating a single type of human flourishing, enabling instead a common basis for many different ways of life.[20] That common basis grows substantially out of a consideration of human rights discourse and concerns itself centrally with the basic minimums that all human beings, *qua* human beings, deserve to have.

I agree with Nussbaum and support the principles motivating the capabilities approach as she has elaborated it. First of all, I agree that most political theories have overestimated the extent to which their subjects are free, equal, and independent, and that this constitutes a serious flaw. In various stages of human life, from infancy to temporary physical disability to old age, individuals must rely upon the support, love, and sustenance of others in order to survive. Always vulnerable to disease and accident, the sheer *contingency* of our freedom, independence, and equality is an inescapable fact, and any political or ethical tradition that ignores our human fragility is to that extent built upon a false assumption.[21]

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[19] Ibid., 182.

[20] Nussbaum claims, like Rawls, to preserve space for the contracting parties to subsequently choose their own comprehensive conceptions of the good, although I would argue that the degree to which the parties can disagree about the good is much constrained. Nussbaum seems to have built into her theory a rather comprehensive conception of what the good life is for human beings, and it explicitly presupposes the sorts of goods that are embraced by a liberal pluralistic society. See Ibid., 70. Her approach thus oddly both sidesteps and mounts an essentialist argument against issues of cultural relativism.

[21] For an excellent discussion of the inherent vulnerability that unites all persons *as human*, see Martha A. Fineman, "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition," *Yale Journal of Law & Feminism* 20, no. 1 (2008): 8-40.

Nussbaum's approach takes this fragility and contingency seriously, and understands our human need for care as actually *constitutive* of human dignity. She notes that we all begin life as infants and often end as very dependent elders, and that there is much more continuity between the lives of those who are deemed "normal" people and those with lifelong disabilities than we usually acknowledge. With Aristotle, she asserts the human need for sociability and recognition, even as this sociability includes our bodily needs and our need for care. Furthermore, Nussbaum asserts that the relationships required by human dignity include symmetrical relations, like those generally imagined of the "free, equal, and independent" human being, but also relations of "more or less extreme asymmetry; we insist that the nonsymmetrical relations can still contain reciprocity and truly human functioning."[22] For Nussbaum, "our dignity is a legitimate source of entitlement, and those entitlements can be achieved only by cooperation."[23] Indeed. I further support Nussbaum's emphasis on the individual as the proper subject of justice and the measure by which we should determine whether the capabilities are being fully supported. Nussbaum rejects a utilitarian approach, which aggregates complex goods into a single measure and makes trade-offs in which harm to a few is acceptable if it is balanced by a great good for many.

On my view, the claim that every individual human being possesses human dignity and is therefore deserving of respect is a foundational ethical claim. This respect should be understood robustly, as elaborated on the basis of the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing, which include the list of human capabilities and

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[22] Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 160.

[23] Ibid., 43.

protecting human rights for every individual.[24] However, I will argue that the human capabilities and traditional human rights approaches view the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing too narrowly, and that an understanding of the construction of our shared social and cultural imagination has a profound impact on individuals' possibilities for flourishing. It is our common humanity—our shared human dignity and vulnerability—that fundamentally grounds the ethical relation between persons. The person sitting next to me at the café as I write this makes a constant and particular ethical claim on me, merely through her existence as a fellow human being. The ethical claim that other human beings make on me through our very shared humanity finds its grounding in a particular notion of the vulnerability that is essential to human life.

I understand the inherent vulnerability of all persons along the same lines as Martha Fineman has recently elaborated it in her work. Fineman's "vulnerable subject" is explicitly designed to take the place of the former liberal, autonomous, independent subject criticized by Nussbaum. Fineman's use of the term "vulnerable" differs from the usual negative connotations of that term, and instead purports to describe "a universal, inevitable, enduring aspect of the human condition that must be at the heart of our concept of social and state responsibility."[25] For Fineman, as for me, there is an inescapable contingency to the particular facts of any individual human life, and even the most powerful and resource-rich individual, simply by virtue of being human, exists in intrinsic vulnerability to the accidents of life. This vulnerability is foremost understood

[24] Nussbaum notes that not all capabilities may be actualized or accessible to all individuals, however. For example, some persons with severe mental disabilities may not be able to exercise a right to political participation. See Ibid., 186-91.

[25] Fineman, "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition," 8.

as embodied, insofar as we are always potentially at risk of having our bodies violated or harmed in some way by accident, intent, or otherwise. Our vulnerability also extends, however, to psychic, emotional, or even spiritual damage. Fineman sums it up nicely:

> Constant and variable throughout life, individual vulnerability encompasses not only damage that has been done in the past and speculative harms of the distant future, but also the possibility of immediate harm. We are beings who live with the ever present possibility that our needs and circumstances will change. On an individual level, the concept of vulnerability (unlike that of liberal autonomy) captures this present potential for each of us to become dependent based upon our persistent susceptibility to misfortune and catastrophe.[26]

Fineman, as a legal scholar, has a particular set of ends in mind that this concept of a vulnerable subject will significantly affect (for the better, I think). My own use of the concept has particular effects for ethical theory. I argue that, because of the inherent and inescapable vulnerability of every human subject, we rely upon one another to a significant extent to preserve our human dignity and to enable the conditions for the possibility of flourishing for each one of us. This ethical claim has a philosophical genealogy that descends from Kant, insofar as I depend on others to respect and uphold my human dignity just insofar as others also depend on me to respect and uphold their human dignity. The fact of our mutual vulnerability anchors a categorical imperative that each person respect and uphold every other person's human dignity to the maximum extent possible for each individual.[27]

This insight requires clarification, because I suspect it is subject to some potential misunderstanding. I want to claim that every individual human person, on account of

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[26] Ibid., 12.

[27] I say "to the maximum extent possible for each individual" because, following Nussbaum, there will clearly be human individuals whose capacities for caring for themselves—much less caring for others—is greatly diminished by the very fact of their human vulnerability. Individuals with severe disabilities, for example, may be less able to give the kind of support for others' human dignity than would generally be the case.

being human and thus sharing in human vulnerability, has the duty thereby to respect and uphold the minimum necessary conditions for ensuring human dignity for every other individual human person. Our response to the ethical duties that derive from our mutual vulnerability are enhanced by empathy for others which will require concrete expressions (a point I shall explore in depth in Chapter 2), but such empathy is not logically necessary for the existence of the duty. That is, the ethical duties deriving from our mutual vulnerability could conceivably be understood conceptually on the basis of the categorical imperative or via the principle that one ought always to treat other individuals as members of the kingdom of ends. What it would mean to treat a human person as an end would make direct reference to the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing, which is an empirical and not merely conceptual assessment, because the possibility for a minimum of human flourishing is what ensures our human dignity.

My argument throughout the dissertation is just this: that our ethical duties to other human beings are best understood as being fulfilled through a practice of ethical solidarity—a practice that takes as its aim the creation of conditions for the possibility of human flourishing for all people. The deep personal acceptance of the fact of human vulnerability—such that one makes our shared vulnerability an organizing principle for one's life projects and understood ethical duties—greatly enhances our ability to practice ethical solidarity. My understanding of the ethical duties generated by human vulnerability is not best subsumed under a Kantian paradigm, however. In particular, I understand the practice of ethical solidarity as closely allied with virtue ethics. Because the conditions necessary for human flourishing generate the ethical imperatives that the practice of ethical solidarity responds to, the practice of ethical solidarity should be

understood as a virtuous practice. Further, the practice of ethical solidarity is best understood as most fundamentally an interpersonal relation towards others, one in which each individual (as a solidary ally) is predisposed to act in support of other individuals' human dignity.

Institutions, Individuals, and the Responsibility for Promoting Human Capabilities

There are some theorists, particularly feminist theorists, who are made nervous by strong claims about the ethical status of the individual, particularly from liberal quarters. They fear that focusing so much attention on the individual is detrimental to the proper theorizing of relationships, communities, and group affiliation. Focusing on the individual, they argue, isolates the person from her or his communal identity and formative relationships, effectively ignoring the impact that such liaisons have on the well-being and the robust identity of the person.[28] I think these criticisms are motivated by a legitimate concern, but that careful theoretical focus on the individual need not necessarily fall into these simplifying and isolating traps—a feat I attempt in the course of this project.

In fact, my strongest point of disagreement with Nussbaum comes down to her refusal to focus on the individual at the moment it matters most. That is, rather than place responsibility for securing the minimum of human capabilities on all human *persons*, she places the burden squarely on the shoulders of *institutions*. Although it is clear that institutional involvement is a necessity in the promotion of human capabilities, I argue that Nussbaum goes too far in excusing individuals from their reciprocal duties to

[28] I am thinking here of Charles Taylor or Seyla Behabib, for example.

promote the capabilities. Specifically, she views individuals as having delegated their duties to institutions; institutions are derivatively responsible for the practical ethical duty to promote human capabilities.

Nussbaum argues that the practical responsibility for promoting the human capabilities belongs to institutions alone for four main reasons: collective action problems, issues of fairness, individual versus institutional capacity, and preservation of a flourishing personal life for individuals. (Surprisingly, Nussbaum devotes a scant five pages to setting out the argument that institutions, not individuals, should bear the practical responsibility for promoting human capabilities.[29]) I shall respond to each of these arguments in turn, and explain why it is important that individual persons retain some ethical responsibility to promote human capabilities in social practice.

First, Nussbaum argues that collective action by a group of individuals causes problems because "if each person tries to think individually what is to be done, this would be a recipe for massive confusion and failure."[30] As an example, she cites the complexities involved in organizing a nation—in terms of its tax code, system of property rights, criminal justice, etc. This argument implicitly assumes its conclusion as part of the premise. Nussbaum here understands the promotion of human capabilities as necessarily based on a complex, organized social and political support system, and such a system therefore clearly requires institutionalization rather than the input of myriad individuals in order to function, as she argues.

Nonetheless, I argue that we should not understand the mechanism of support for human capabilities as solely based on a large-scale, organized system. Although

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[29] Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 306-10.

[30] Ibid., 307.

institutional structures (at least in the form of laws and governmental policy) are undoubtedly necessary to promote the human capabilities, they are by no means sufficient, though this is implied by Nussbaum's argument here. The action and support of individual persons is equally as important as that of institutions for the preservation of human rights and the promotion of human capabilities, and persons can have an impact where institutions cannot—in the very fabric of society.

Merely in terms of preserving our negative freedom, it is an individual person, not an abstract institution (or a "magical superperson," as Nussbaum remarks[31]), who raises a hand to harm another or who uses violence to prevent another's political participation or freedom of mobility. The distinction between the actions of individuals and the actions of institutions-via-individuals is not sufficiently clear-cut to dismiss the role of personal responsibility in preserving others' negative freedom.[32] The gesture that bestows responsibility for promoting the capabilities solely onto the shoulders of institutions requires further analysis. What exactly counts as an institution, on this model? If the comprehensive whole of the United States government (state and federal, taken together or separately) as well as organizations like the Red Cross, the NAACP, the Boy Scouts of America, and Emory University's President's Commission on the Status of Women all count as "institutions" of some kind (as it seems they ought), our use of the word is too broad to say anything very meaningful about the particular details of institutional responsibility. Or, at the least, further detailed analysis seems necessary in terms of how

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[31] Ibid.

[32] For example, personal practical responsibility for preserving the negative freedoms of others would be particularly relevant for those individuals who were responsible for the violence surrounding the 2008 elections in Zimbabwe. In some respect, it makes sense to say that some of these acts of violence were done on behalf of, in the name of, or by order of the reigning political party (Robert Mugabe's Zanu-PF party), but the direct proximate cause of the violence was the particular individuals who raised a hand against another.

we might assign ethical responsibilities to institutions and the individuals who compose them or serve under them based on the scope of the actions performed by the institution, its legitimating force or power to enact social changes, and the principles by which the institution is founded and organized.

Second, Nussbaum claims that leaving the practical responsibility of promoting human capabilities to individuals will result in unfairness. Those (presumably well-off) persons who care more about the poor than others will spend a significant amount of money to support the poor, thus "impoverishing myself and my family in comparison to those who begin in the same place but who do nothing for the poor."[33] This claim indicates some curious assumptions about fairness in fulfilling one's practical ethical responsibilities. First, Nussbaum here implicitly associates personal "impoverishment" with the loss of money or capital, rather than, say, the impoverishment which results from a loss of integrity, self-respect, or human compassion. The concern that ties unfairness to monetary wealth implicitly places significant value on the preservation of financial well-being, but this valuation seems to exclude or ignore the potential valuation of other sorts of well-being (e.g. – moral or ethical well-being or the maintenance of one's personal integrity) above financial well-being. This raises questions about the relative value of what one loses (money) versus what one gains or maintains (integrity, human compassion) when one "goes above and beyond" in responding to human need. These sorts of relative value questions can only be answered, I argue, using Nussbaum's own claim that the conditions of the capabilities approach allow individuals to choose their own comprehensive conceptions of the good. On this model, "going above and beyond"

[33] Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 308.

could conceivably be understood as an integral part of someone's particular conception of the good life, and it is therefore not Nussbaum's place to dispute it, although her concern remains in another vein.

Nussbaum's only example of what counts as "unfairness" comes down to inequalities of wealth. It is thus difficult to see how giving individuals their proper practical responsibility for promoting human capabilities might result in some other (non-monetary) kind of unfairness. Further, although the issue of economic redistribution is a complex subject, the example Nussbaum describes paints a rather simplistic picture of financial gain and loss.[34] Such a model of fairness seems to presume a deep selfishness and emotional alienation from others on the part of "private" individuals. My point is that institutions and individuals each have unique roles to play in fulfilling their practical responsibilities for promoting human capabilities, whereas Nussbaum has taken individuals-*qua*-individuals out of the picture entirely.

In this example Nussbaum again pits institutional support systems against individual actions as an either/or option. *Either* the system imposes a proportional burden on everyone, *or* some people will give away their wealth and "incur a relative disadvantage" compared to others who hold onto their money.[35] Instead of this false dichotomy, we should acknowledge the role that institutions can and should play in ensuring "fairness" when it comes to the distribution of wealth, while at the same time insisting that individuals have an *ethical obligation*, whether or not they choose to fulfill

[34] It is unclear, for example, that the efforts of some individuals to bring up the standard of living of the very poor might not ultimately benefit society as a whole. In fact, the financial help given to the very poor may, through social programs, for example, enable more people to become economically productive members of society, which strengthens the economy of the entire society, thus raising the overall standard of living for us all.

[35] Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 308.

it, to promote the human capabilities of others—even when that includes providing financial support. The issue is how to give this obligation a *felt reality* within moral agents, rather than how to assign the obligation elsewhere because lack of such felt reality generates potential(ly unfair) inequalities. Furthermore, formal institutional operations aren't necessarily required to ensure that each individual does their fair share. Social norms that require individual members of a community to share certain kinds of responsibilities can have their own very compelling sorts of force on those individuals who might try to shirk their duties.

Nussbaum's third objection to individual responsibility for promoting the human capabilities is that "institutions have both cognitive and causal powers that individuals do not have,"[36] and these powers are "pertinent" in allocating responsibility for promoting the capabilities. She states that "nations and corporations have powers of prediction and foresight that individuals in isolation do not have,"[37] although she offers no additional details in support of this claim. But why insist on viewing the predictive power of individuals *in isolation*? Nussbaum's stated concern here continues to rely on the either/or dichotomy of individuals vs. institutions, and revolves around the semantics of whether institutions or the individuals who compose them are the possessors of predictive knowledge.

Finally, Nussbaum argues that the flourishing of individual persons would be harmed by their efforts to promote the flourishing of others. This particular motivation for excusing individuals from practical responsibility for promoting the human capabilities seems to spring from Nussbaum's intense aversion to utilitarianism and its

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

"unlimited sense of [personal] responsibility."[38] Nussbaum writes: "[The capabilities approach] would be a self-defeating theory indeed if it were understood in such a way that the injunction to promote human capabilities *devoured the life of each person*, removing personal projects, concerns, and space to such an extent that nobody at all had the chance to lead a truly human life."[39] But Nussbaum offers no argument that the injunction to promote human capabilities must necessarily be understood in such a limiting way.[40] Instead, she paints a picture of compulsive, sleepless activism untempered by any concern for the individual activist's own flourishing, resulting in a society of well-meaning individuals exhausted and suffering under the burden of responsibility for promoting human capabilities for all. (This image also recalls her earlier example of the benevolent person who contributes more than her fair share to help the poor.)

The intent seems to be to *frighten* us into relieving individuals of their practical ethical responsibility to others, for fear that we will otherwise call into being this bleak image of our empty but deeply responsible lives. There seem to be two important theoretical mistakes here. First, Nussbaum seems to make the mistake of conflating collective responsibility with the responsibility of one individual. That is, all of us, as individual members of the collective of human beings, *share* responsibility for promoting the human capabilities. We have the responsibility to do what we can as individuals to

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[38] Ibid., 309 See also Susan Wolf, "The Moral of Moral Luck," in *Setting the Moral Compass: Essays by Women Philosophers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 113-127.

[39] Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 309, emphasis mine.

[40] Scholars like Bernard Williams also share this fear about the all-consuming nature of the moral life. On this view, "moral saints" will sacrifice their own well-being in deference to "the movement" or "the cause." Theorists who worry about the impact of the moral life on one's personal life seem to share a concern that we "bracket" the ethical away from the rest of life. They are unable to see how ethical life and "normal" life could come together in an integrated, healthy whole. I argue that this is absolutely possible, and hope to show that the practice of solidarity helps to achieve this integration.

promote the human capabilities of others. What this does not mean is that each individual person has the responsibility, all alone as an individual, to secure the human capabilities for all others. Because *ought* implies *can*, clearly there can be no individual practical responsibility for securing all of the conditions necessary for the minimum of human capabilities to be available to all human persons. But as a collective of individuals, we absolutely can secure the conditions necessary for the minimum of human capabilities to be available to all human persons. Therefore each individual, as a member of the collective, has the responsibility to promote the human capabilities. We can argue that this responsibility is applicable to every individual, moreover, insofar as—at least at the level of ensuring negative freedom—an individual person has the potential to block or cause harm to another individual's human capabilities.

Second, and related to the first, Nussbaum appears to assume that responsibility for *promoting* human capabilities for all is equivalent to *actually securing* those capabilities—a monumental task, indeed. That is, Nussbaum seems to assume that—in the case of individuals, at least—if we are working hard to ensure human capabilities for all, but have not fully succeeded in this goal, we do not see the progress we have made as worthwhile or "good enough." In Nussbaum's imagination, fully securing the capabilities for all is the only acceptable outcome. Therefore, well-meaning individuals will run themselves into the ground with the effort of trying to *actually secure* the capabilities, since *some* incremental progress is not "enough." This substitution seems especially curious given that Nussbaum elsewhere acknowledges the massive changes that would be required for us to live in a world where a minimum of human capabilities are *actually* secured for all persons, even should that responsibility fall to institutions.

In the face of such a monumental task, we require the space to acknowledge small victories. In any activist movement, the activists themselves often face periods of slow progress, or even the loss of past gains, yet do not therefore feel that their efforts have been for naught. These activists understand that there is more to life than "the cause," and that without nurturing their own personal and spiritual well-being, they will quickly burn out and lose the energy to continue agitating for change. In the end, Nussbaum's worries about the sleepless activist appear to stem from a theoretical concern about how the ethical life can be fully integrated with "the rest" of our lives, rather than from a sober look at the lives of living, breathing, (flourishing) committed activists.

The problem of individual responsibility for the promotion of human capabilities is not one of practical achievability, therefore. The only remaining objection is thus that such responsibility is burdensome on the individual to the point of harm. This view seems mistaken. A perspective that takes into account relations of solidarity is well-situated to show how the shared burden supported by solidarity practices allows for individual flourishing while maintaining individual responsibility for the promotion of human capabilities. Evidence of the flourishing personal lives of highly productive activists for social justice is all around us, though I acknowledge that there are examples to the contrary. (The existence of exhausted activists is not sufficient evidence, however, that a life of activism is *necessarily* detrimental to one's personal life.) The support of other individuals in solidarity plays a key role in sustaining each individual activist in order that ethical and political burdens do not take over their lives to the point that no room is left for flourishing personal projects. Moreover, the ethical duty to promote human capabilities—in my terms, to respect and support one another's human dignity—

does not even necessarily imply a life devoted to activism. Instead, I argue that the ethical duty to respect and promote the dignity of other human beings requires an everyday practice which I shall call "ethical solidarity." I elaborate this practice in detail in the final section of this chapter.

I should acknowledge that Nussbaum attempts to finesse the point, saying, "Institutions are made by people, and it is ultimately people who should be seen as having moral duties to promote human capabilities. Nonetheless, … [it] is far better to create a decent institutional structure and then to regard individuals as having *delegated their personal ethical responsibility* to that structure."[41] So even if *in principle* individuals have the primary ethical duty to promote human capabilities, Nussbaum claims we can think of that duty as having been delegated to well-made institutions. In other words, individuals are *relieved of their ethical duty* by making the promotion of human capabilities the responsibility of institutions. To my mind, that doesn't sound much like people ultimately retain their ethical duty—they get to pass it off to someone (or something) else.[42] This position underestimates individuals' capacity for self-transformation and the significance of that transformation for society.

Excusing individuals from their *primary* ethical responsibility to respect other human beings on the basis of our shared human dignity is not an acceptable theoretical move. Even in practical terms, it doesn't make sense—institutions, even well-designed ones, are notorious violators of human rights. Examples abound: multi-national

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[41] Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 307, emphasis mine.

[42] Again, Nussbaum appears to make this move out of a fear of the burden of the ethical life for the individual and her doubts that individuals are capable of navigating the tensions between fulfilling their ethical responsibilities and maintaining a flourishing "personal life." This move also seems to indicate a rejection on Nussbaum's part of any theory of virtue ethics, in which the individual most adamantly maintains her or his personal ethical responsibilities to others.

companies' abuse of underpaid and overworked laborers in Mexico and Indonesia, the government of Saudi Arabia sentencing a woman who was a victim of gang-rape to 200 lashes and six months in jail for violating laws on associating with the opposite sex, the United States government's support of extradition, torture, and the suspension of *habeas corpus* in the prosecution of the War on Terror. Even on a less obviously egregious level, in the past 26 years the United States, a country that claims to champion freedom, equality, and the respect of human rights, has failed to ratify the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. And let us not forget the banality of evil exposed by Hannah Arendt, in which the Nazi perpetrators of crimes against humanity claimed not to be responsible because they were only following orders sent down through the institutional hierarchy. Institutionalization in many ways seems to be the easiest route to excusing horrifying human rights abuses; it removes individuals from the person-to-person interaction and accountability that invokes that most basic ethical duty, to respect one another as fellow human beings possessed of a shared human dignity.

Finally, there is a stark difference between the abstract theoretical situation of making a political contract and then assigning responsibilities for promoting human capabilities, and the actual, practical situation we face in a world of pre-constituted states and multi-national organizations. It is no easy task to re-form and re-prioritize the goals of already existing institutions to conform with a political theory, even when the theoretical (and practical) reasons for doing so may be compelling.

Although Nussbaum gives an admirable analysis of human need and the potential for ensuring human dignity through a capabilities approach, the main weakness of her

theory is the failure to account for the impact of culture and the social imagination on people's possibilities for flourishing. Ironically, Nussbaum's theory seems to displace the individual whose rights she is concerned to maintain. The list of capabilities is not fully able to capture the subtle ways in which culture and social structure can degrade the human dignity of the marginalized or those who do not fall neatly under the category of the "normal." Even Nussbaum's efforts to address problems raised by the concept of the "normal" through her arguments about the physically and mentally disabled primarily involve the practical means of access to, and acknowledgement in, society as it currently stands. She implies that if we only rearranged the world around us in such a way as to take into account the needs of mentally and physically impaired persons, the majority of their current handicaps would disappear.[43]

Nussbaum's analysis of the social definition of the "normal" is simply "the idea of statistical frequency" and the way in which society is shaped to cater to those who fit into the most populous category.[44] For Nussbaum, the way to correct this is to include those populations that are less statistically frequent (e.g. – the blind, deaf, or wheelchair users) by rearranging our public and private spaces to accommodate them. Thus mentally impaired children would be included in "normal" classroom learning as much as possible, so that socialization with other children would help break down the stigma usually attached to their condition. Nussbaum argues that we should make these changes because

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[43] Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 116-7.

[44] Ibid., 116.

i) "it is good in itself to do so,"[45] and ii) it helps to illuminate "the continuity between the so-called normal and people with lifelong impairments."[46]

Nussbaum's primary concerns here are those of a quintessentially liberalist viewpoint, in which all that really needs to change are the modes of access to certain resources and privileges. While I agree that it is good in itself to restructure public and private spaces to take into account the differing needs of the "non-normal" population, and while I also concur that all humans share a common vulnerability to mental and physical impairment, I do not think that Nussbaum's recommendations for social change go deep enough. She lacks a more nuanced analysis of what it means to be "normal" in our society, particularly in terms of one's membership in stigmatized social categories, and either underestimates or misunderstands the harm that can come to a person who is marginalized or outcast from the mainstream.

Judith Butler on Self- and Social Transformation

and the Construction of "Livable Lives"

While traditional liberal approaches (like Nussbaum's) to rectifying the harms of systemic oppression look to the redistribution of goods or certain kinds of social access, so-called "postmodern" scholars of feminist and queer theory have generally been better at identifying the ways in which less tangible or less easily identifiable factors in the social fabric generate persistent harms against marginalized populations or identities. Judith Butler, for example, does an excellent job of drawing attention to the problems of normalization and hegemonic culture. Her conceptualization of what she calls "livable

[45] Ibid., 121.

[46] Ibid., 127.

lives" engages directly with the harms of social and cultural marginalization and alienation. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler explains a view of human dignity which mirrors, in some respects, Nussbaum's account. Both Nussbaum and Butler base human dignity on our shared vulnerability. Butler writes that "we are constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies."[47] More centrally, however, both understand the human need for relationship and recognition as fundamental to human dignity. Recalling Aristotle, Nussbaum recognizes the importance of interpersonal relationships for human dignity, regardless of whether these relations are symmetrical or asymmetrical. Butler also characterizes personhood as intrinsically relational; however, her understanding of this aspect of human dignity is closely connected to the desire for recognition *as a human being* and to freedom as a fundamental value. Butler's view of what it means to count as human is more nuanced on this point than Nussbaum's:

> [W]hen we struggle for rights, we are not simply struggling for rights that attach to my person, but we are struggling *to be conceived as persons*. And there is a difference between the former and the latter. If we are struggling for rights that attach, or should attach, to my personhood, then we assume that personhood as already constituted. But if we are struggling not only to be conceived as persons, but to create a social transformation of the very meaning of personhood, then the assertion of rights becomes a way of intervening into the social and political process by which the human is articulated.[48]

The primary shortcoming of Nussbaum's capabilities approach is that it pre-conceives all members of the human species *as human*, ontologically, and assigns them on that basis the list of human capabilities. What Butler wants to argue is that we cannot take it for granted that all (ontological) human beings are recognized or acknowledged as such in *social* terms, in terms of their treatment, recognition, and inclusion in society and culture.

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[47] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 18. This language is also reminiscent of Martha Fineman's characterization of vulnerability.
[48] Ibid., 32-3.

The personal and societal transformations that will be necessary to recognize all "ontological" persons as *social* persons—as human insofar as humanness requires meaningful reciprocal recognition—entail a notably different set of changes than those Nussbaum proposes on the basis of the list of human capabilities.

In contrast to Nussbaum, Butler has a two-fold understanding of "normativity." First, she understands it in a way similar to Nussbaum: "On the one hand, it refers to … the commonly held presuppositions by which we are oriented, and which give direction to our actions."[49] That is, it refers to the kind of statistical frequency and social conventions which, for practicality's sake, govern our lives to some extent. However, Butler also has a deeper analysis of the "normal." She understands that normativity may operate in a way that is harmful and which strips and outstrips personal agencies:

> On the other hand, normativity refers to the process of normalization, the way that certain norms, ideas and ideals hold sway over embodied life, provide coercive criteria for normal "men" and "women." And in this second sense, we see that norms are what govern "intelligible" life, "real" men and "real" women. And that *when we defy these norms, it is unclear whether we are still living, or ought to be, whether our lives are valuable, or can be made to be*, whether our genders are real, or ever can be regarded as such.[50]

The difficulty with norms in this second sense is that they cause certain people to be marginalized to the point of being unrecognizable as human persons, or "unintelligible." That is, given the deep need for relationality in human life, Butler argues that certain socially and culturally marginalized lives—and notably many queer lives—are made "unlivable" through their exclusion from social recognition as it is configured by predominant structures of power.

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[49] Ibid., 206.
[50] Ibid., emphasis mine.

"Unlivable lives" result from being excluded from the conventional *social* understanding of who counts as human and the subsequent denial of social recognition and support. Because the social and cultural structures of power only sanction and support a narrow understanding of "normal" lives, people whose lives fall outside the norm (often LGBTQ lives[51]) are subject to daily acts of denigration, discrimination, alienation, and both psychic and physical violence. Butler cites LGBTQ suicides (and, I would add, hate-based murders) as evidence of the very literal unlivability of certain lives under these conditions.[52]

On Butler's view, recognition as human makes a life "livable." The means and vocabulary of that recognition are not fixed, however: "The terms by which we are recognized as human are socially articulated and changeable. And sometimes the very terms that confer 'humanness' on some individuals are those that deprive certain other individuals of the possibility of achieving that status, producing a differential between the human and the less-than-human."[53] When certain persons are "recognized" as less-than-human, "that form of qualified recognition does not lead to a viable life."[54] For example, the recognition of a transsexual or transgender person *as such* often leads to extreme physical violence ending in murder.[55] On a less extreme scale, a transgender person who,

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[51] LGBTQ stands for: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/transgender, queer. I acknowledge that these labels are not exhaustive in describing non-heterosexual persons, although my use of the acronym is intended to suggest the larger community of non-heterosexuals. Examples of other labels not included in this acronym are "gender-queer," "asexual," and "intersex," each of which signifies a different identity, and some people do not identify with any particular label at all.

[52] This is not at all to suggest that these lives are "unlivable" in the sense of *worthless*. People who have "unlivable lives" are emphatically persons of value, whose lives are valuable. Rather, Butler wishes to highlight the constricting *conditions* under which such lives are lived.

[53] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 2.

[54] Ibid., 2.

[55] The well-known cases of Gwen Arajo and Brandon Teena come to mind. It has been estimated that, in the United States, transgender individuals have a one in 12 chance of being murdered, as opposed to the

for example, wishes to be recognized as male faces an "unlivable" life if others persistently recognize and treat him as female.

One of the central conditions for human dignity, for Butler, is to be recognized *as human* by others; this is a point which Nussbaum is unable to capture through her list of capabilities. In capability #7, "Affiliation," part A, Nussbaum cites the capability "to recognize and show concern for other human beings,"[56] but this is a recognition which looks outward to the other, rather than recognition *by the other* of one's own human dignity. In part B, she writes of the capability of "being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of nondiscrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin."[57] It is unclear exactly how one would manifest a capability "to be able to be treated" in a certain way, since one's treatment seems to rest not with some innate internal quality of the individual, but with the actions of *others*. Furthermore Nussbaum's citation of "provisions of nondiscrimination" clearly refers to state and institutional policy, rather than the amorphous imagery and discourse of culture and the social structures of power that concern Butler.

So, with Butler, I affirm the need for a deeper understanding of what it means to be recognized and treated *as human* in one's society and culture. The means to such recognition, on both Butler's view and mine, is through the transformation of individual consciousness as well as social and cultural structures. Butler writes, "changing the institutions by which humanly viable choice is established and maintained is a

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average person's chances: one in 18,000. "HRC | How Do Transgender People Suffer from Discrimination?," http://www.hrc.org/issues/1508.htm#

[56] Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 77.

[57] Ibid.

prerequisite for the exercise of self-determination. In this sense, individual agency is bound up with social critique and social transformation."[58] So, in order to authentically make a particular claim about oneself, such a claim must be "intelligible" in terms of the normalizing social and cultural institutions that establish the menu of viable choices for human life. Changing those institutions requires societal and cultural shifts that equally and reciprocally alter the consciousness of individual persons.

Up to this point I have been arguing that Butler's work addresses a significant gap in the understanding of what constitutes the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing as Nussbaum has elaborated them, on the basis of the capabilities approach. However, it is not my intention to give a one-sided account in which Butler shores up Nussbaum's theoretical work, since I also believe that—on the subject of what makes a life "livable"—Butler's account could also find a needed supplement in Nussbaum's work.

In particular, I think Butler could benefit from Nussbaum's work on the subject of what material and political conditions specifically constitute or enable livable lives. The list of human capabilities provides concrete, specific criteria, the realization of which ought to guarantee a minimally flourishing life within the parameters of Nussbaum's worldview. Following what I take to be her understanding of Foucault, Butler consistently argues that norms of all kinds are limiting to the freedom of the individual, and she understands the overcoming or dismantling of hegemonic norms as a continual, ceaseless process. Because Butler's vision of what it means to have a "livable" life is largely framed in terms of *negative* freedom or *critical* work, I argue that Nussbaum

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[58] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 7.

provides a needed *constructive* account of the conditions necessary for securing human dignity.

"Livable" lives and "flourishing" lives share an overlap in meaning, but they are not synonymous. It seems to me that Butler's conception of "livable" lives is mainly concerned with expanding the range of viable life-choices available for all members of a society, whereas Nussbaum's conception of "flourishing" lives takes the goal of trying to elaborate a concrete minimum of conditions for the possibility of flourishing human lives. The difference seems to hinge on the more intangible, theoretical/cultural focus of Butler's work versus Nussbaum's concern with prevailing material conditions and specific institutional structures. I argue that these are both legitimate and significant areas of concern for understanding what it means to be treated as a human being. We should strive to address both of these concerns, seeking to make beneficial transformations in both the cultural imaginary which governs social norms as well as the material and institutional conditions that so often determine the difference between thriving and mere survival.

What would such a transformation entail? Butler makes clear that the transformations necessary to expand our possibilities for livable lives will be uncomfortable, uncertain, and require exposure to other knowledges and ways of life that are very different from our own. It is at this point that the question of epistemology becomes central to her argument. Butler writes, "To intervene in the name of transformation means precisely to disrupt what has become settled knowledge and knowable reality"[59]—a disruption which will necessarily call into question the

[59] Ibid., 27.

established certainty we formerly had about ourselves and the nature of human experience. In the process of initiating this transformation, "one must enter into a collective work in which one's own status as a subject must, for democratic reasons, become disoriented, exposed to what it does not know."[60] Ultimately, such an intentional disorientation or disruption of self will require the virtues in a context in which their justification is uncertain with respect to a human *telos*.

Butler argues that undergoing this transformation entails submitting ourselves to a process which she calls "cultural translation:"

> The point is not to assimilate foreign or unfamiliar notions of gender or humanness into our own as if it is simply a matter of incorporating alienness into an established lexicon. Cultural translation is also a process of yielding our most fundamental categories, that is, seeing how and why they break up, require resignification when they encounter the limits of an available episteme: what is unknown or not yet known. It is crucial to recognize that the notion of the human will only be built over time in and by the process of cultural translation, … and this apprehension, at the limit of what is familiar, parochial, and already known, will be the occasion for both an ethical and social transformation.[61]

I am interested in the means by which we can mindfully initiate these processes of cultural translation. Given that recognition and treatment of the Other as human is an ethical duty, but one which is enmeshed with the necessity for political and social transformations (for both Nussbaum *and* Butler), it becomes critical to ask how we can actively invite the kind of cultural translation necessary to expand our epistemological horizons in a way that also makes possible political and societal transformations. The result of such personal and social transformations would be an expansion of the possibilities for recognizing alternate forms of life as viably human.

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[60] Ibid., 36.

[61] Ibid., 38.

The Role of Ethical Solidarity

The active invitation to transformation suggested by Butler inaugurates a crucial role for the practice of what I shall call "ethical solidarity." The concept of solidarity is uniquely suited to respond to the need (articulated above) for both personal and societal transformation in response to ethical duties. Sally Scholz has aptly defined the concept of solidarity as describing "some form of unity (however tenuously the members might be united) that mediates between the individual and the community and entails positive moral duties."[62] Yet Scholz's account does not address the transformation of persons I suggest is necessary for relations of ethical solidarity.

As I have shown, neither Butler nor Nussbaum has yet adequately considered how best to accomplish the transformation of persons and society necessary to realize their ideals. The practice of ethical solidarity is my answer to this question. As Butler has argued, each individual person is only guaranteed a livable and flourishing life by being included under the category of the human, not just linguistically or ontologically but in *social practice*. In order to enable this social practice of recognizing (and treating) others as human, individuals and cultures must alter entrenched notions of the (human) "norm" and transform the oppressive social, cultural, and political environments governed by such norms.[63] We must institute a social practice—both individual and collective—which encourages *recognition as human* of the Other, thereby performatively expanding the concept of humanity. This social practice is the practice of ethical solidarity.

In order to combat the harms of marginalization or cultural alienation, we need an understanding of interpersonal interactions and the reverberations of those interactions in

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[62] Sally J. Scholz, *Political Solidarity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 5.
[63] "Norms" in this context should be understood in Butler's second sense of normativity as harmful.

the larger culture that can work against or undermine oppressive social and cultural structures. These practices will resemble traditional virtues insofar as they attach to an individual's character and sense of self, but it is the relations and interactions—the social practices—stemming from this character that will be transformative for society.

Ethical solidarity is the daily habitual practice of striving to treat other human beings in a way that recognizes and acknowledges their human dignity. As such, and given the account of the conditions necessary for human dignity that I have elaborated above, the practice of ethical solidarity will address the concrete material and political needs of others as well as those more intangible needs that involve social and cultural recognition and making space in the cultural imaginary for a variety of different forms of human life and experience. So for example, "solidary allies" who practice ethical solidarity will be responsive to the needs of others who are hungry, poor, and sick as well as those who are oppressed, marginalized, or denigrated. Although it is often the case that the same groups of people experience both of these two general categories of needs, this is not always the case. That is, there may be people who are (for example) hungry and sick but not oppressed or marginalized, and vice versa. Solidary allies who practice ethical solidarity will be sensitive to the variety of interrelationships of these needs and the ways in which certain afflictions (e.g. - oppression) may be the cause of others (e.g. – poverty).

The practice of ethical solidarity works in tandem with efforts to (re)form institutions in accord with justice. As I have argued above, there is clearly significant work to be done on the institutional level in order to create the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing. This institutional work will align with many of

Nussbaum's concerns, such as providing a system for implementing a just distribution of wealth across societies, both at the state/governmental level as well as globally/internationally. In the liberal humanist tradition, and particularly in social and political philosophy, many scholars are at work on theorizing the best ways of structuring institutions to be in accord with justice.[64] Few of these scholars focus on the potential contributions to be made at the individual or communal level, however. There is a far greater focus on "top-down" methods for securing justice and human dignity than there is on "bottom-up" or "grassroots" methods in contemporary work on political philosophy.

On the other hand, as I have argued, feminist and queer postmodern scholars are centrally focused on problems related to unjust structures of power, hegemonic and harmful social norms, and the limiting conditions of subject-formation. However, such work has lately shied away from discussions of the conditions or characteristics that unite all human beings as such as well as from discussions of transformative practices of the self. Furthermore such postmodern work often tends to utilize negative or critical approaches to these problems rather than positive, constructive responses.

Because the role of individual responsibility (understood equally as individuals-in-community) is irreducible to institutional responsibility, as I have argued, ethical solidarity plays a unique role in securing the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing. In what follows and in subsequent chapters of the dissertation, my project is to elaborate what the practice of ethical solidarity is, how it functions to transform self and society, and its relation to philosophical notions of humanism and feminist and queer projects that work against a variety of forms of oppression. I intend my account of

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[64] See, for example, Carol C. Gould, *Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

ethical solidarity to serve as a positive, constructive account of the ways in which individuals, *qua* fellow human beings, can and ought to lend support to one another in the pursuit of human flourishing and livable lives for all. My project thus fills an important gap in contemporary scholarship on feminist ethics and global concerns about human rights.

Ethical Solidarity as the Means to Self- and Social Transformation

Ethical solidarity is a practice which mediates between the individual and the community and which is aimed at the positive transformation of both, in support of the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing. I refer to ethical solidarity as a "practice" in the sense that it is enacted in a plurality of ways and on multiple scales every day. Transformation takes place in the personal, institutional, social, and political realms; ethical solidarity is a *network* of these practices.

As a practice of self-transformation, ethical solidarity is a personal practice akin to Aristotelian virtues as well as to Foucaultian aesthetics or technologies of the self. As a personal practice with relation to the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing, ethical solidarity is characterized by two aspects: i) internal workings on one's perceptions of other people and one's comprehension of self and others in relation to prevailing structures of power and ii) readiness to intervene in practical matters on behalf of the human dignity of others.

Regarding one's internal perceptions of self and others in relation to power, ethical solidarity requires the active "de-centering" of the self, which prioritizes concern for the humanity of the Other over preserving one's own sense of familiarity, comfort, or

what is "normal". De-centering happens in diverse ways and is centrally concerned with structures of power that result in forms of oppression—often those that result from overly narrow conceptions of the "norm." In whatever respect one's identity coincides with the dominant norms of one's culture (in the United States: white, heterosexual, male, upper-class, etc.), one can practice seeing from the margins rather than the center.

The successful practice of de-centering results in a fundamental transformation of perspective; one learns to view the world with what Butler has called "epistemological humility".[65] When I adopt a position of epistemological humility, I open myself to the possibility that there are other ways of knowing and being in the world than the categories with which I am familiar. I accept the possibility that my former perspective may not accurately reflect all aspects of reality. As David Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz remark:

> Butler suggests that to take responsibility in democratic polity does not mean to take responsibility for "the entirety of the world" but to place ourselves "in a vividly de-centered way" in a world marked by the differences of others. An ethical attachment to others insists that we cannot be the center of the world or act unilaterally on its behalf. It demands a world in which we must sometimes relinquish not only our epistemological but also our political certitude.[66]

(Also note here that Butler's view of our ethical responsibilities as not to the "entirety of the world" works in opposition to the fear of the ethical evidenced by Nussbaum above.) Their point, which I wish to highlight in the practice of self-transformation via ethical solidarity, is that there is a danger in approaching the promotion of human flourishing with a fixed idea of what the conditions of such flourishing are and how they are to be

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[65] The notion of "epistemological humility" relies strongly on the epistemological insights of feminist standpoint theory.

[66] David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?," *Social Text* 23, no. 3/4 (Fall 2005): 15.

achieved, especially coming from individuals who occupy relatively powerful and privileged positions, as are those of us living in the United States. Through the practice of de-centering, one's fundamental perspective on the world is changed.[67] The "de-centering" of ethical solidarity is the transformative daily practice of opening oneself to alternative perspectives and knowledge in recognition of difference. (I explore the practice of self-transformation through ethical solidarity, in light of our shared human vulnerabilities rather than via fixed norms, in-depth in Chapter 2.) Mere thinking is not sufficient, however; one must act.

The individual practice of ethical solidarity is transformative both at the personal and the collective level. De-centered individuals practice ethical solidarity by sharing their perspective with others; small, everyday acts of ethical solidarity may incrementally bring about a sea-change in the culture. To date there has been inadequate theoretical linking of personal and social transformation. I argue that the individual practice of ethical solidarity necessarily has social and political consequences—otherwise it is not truly solidarity.

As noted above, the personal practice of ethical solidarity means both living in such a way that one does not assume the norms or perspectives of dominant majorities and acting and speaking so that oppressive norms (and other obstacles to human dignity for all) do not go unchallenged. Such action may take place in both social as well as political contexts. Socially, ethical solidarity may involve (for example) the expression and support of arts and media produced by, or taking the perspective of, marginalized persons. As Nussbaum has argued in her earlier work, exposure to certain kinds of

[67] This point may also be understood as complementary with virtue ethics. One might easily argue that openness to such epistemological changes requires fortitude of character that is best described in terms of the virtues.

literature and art can greatly expand our capacity for empathy with others who are very different from us.[68] As Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz point out, as scholars, acting in ethical solidarity also means reading the work of scholars who are non-Western, whose work is not written in English. In working on one's internal perceptions of others, the practice of ethical solidarity includes combating the internal discomfort that compels us to categorize someone as having a particular sexual or gender identity. (The old Saturday Night Live skit about the androgynous "Pat" springs to mind.)

The practice of ethical solidarity also means intervening in social situations on behalf of others. For example, solidary allies who identify as straight should speak out when someone around them makes a remark that is denigrating or offensive to LGBTQ people. Intervening in social and cultural discourse in this way is a crucial activity of solidary allies. However, the individual practice of ethical solidarity should also be understood as incorporating such actions in support of human dignity as, for example, outreach to people living with HIV/AIDS. Hence the individual practice of solidary allies addresses itself to material concerns like those of Nussbaum as well as more intangible cultural concerns like those of Butler.

As a means to social transformation, the practice of ethical solidarity operates both culturally and politically. Beyond an individual personal practice, ethical solidarity is also the public habit of joining together in critiquing the dominant, normativizing paradigms of a culture as well as offering utopian, liberatory, and imaginative alternatives. Creating counter-culture and investing in and developing alternative communities, lifestyles, and networks of love and support are part of the social practice

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[68] See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992).

of ethical solidarity. Politically, ethical solidarity means acting so that *all* persons receive the protections extended to "normal" subjects. So, for example, political solidarity for LGBTQ persons requires supporting legislation like the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would make it illegal for employers to fire their employees on the basis of sexual orientation or gender expression. Other examples include filing lawsuits to promote the ability of LGBTQ people to marry and navigating the complex legal process that allows LGBTQ people to adopt the biological children of their partners.

Institutionally and socially, transformative practice requires instituting policies and mores that do not assume all people conform to the dominant norm. For example, many institutional questionnaires now include a third option, "prefer not to answer," when asking whether the respondent is male or female—an act of ethical solidarity with and recognition of those whose gender expression does not conform to the "normal" scheme. Social acts of ethical solidarity span interpersonal relationships, protest movements, activist communities, and campaigns for change in the legal, political, and institutional realms. There is no litmus test as to whether a particular action is an act of ethical solidarity. That determination must stem from an understanding of the context in which the action takes place, the various motivations and consequences of the action, and the multiple meanings that can be attributed to it, given in light of the extent or limits of social and individual imagination.

Though I aim to describe a broad practice of ethical solidarity that is relevant to any struggle against oppression and degradation, I focus in particular on the possibilities for solidarity between people who claim different sexual identities. Often I will focus on the potential for solidarity between those who identify as "straight" and those who

identify as "other" (LGBTQ, etc.), although there are also significant moments for solidary intervention *within* the LGBTQ acronym. This particular focus has a strong sense of urgency given the current political and social turmoil surrounding LGBTQ lives. In the United States we are facing the struggle over "gay marriage," which has received significant media attention, but there are also important struggles for LGBTQ persons over adoption rights, workplace discrimination, protection under the law from hate crimes, and healthcare access, to name a few.

Furthermore, heteronormativity—structures of power that always presume subjects are heterosexual—obstructs the visibility and viability of LGBTQ lives. It prevents LGBTQ persons from having "livable lives;" lives which are acknowledged to have value; lives that are physically and psychologically safe; lives that are included in our shared cultural narratives. The practice of ethical solidarity necessitates a struggle with heteronormativity that requires the transformation of normative ways of seeing and interpreting the world around us.[69]

To help think about ways we can practically engage in epistemological humility and the de-centering of selves, I draw upon work in feminist theories of race. Feminist notions of "border-crossing" and respect for the perspectives of the marginalized are strong foundations for providing guidance in how best to practice ethical solidarity. Because the conversation about race in feminism has been going on for many decades now, mistakes have already been made and corrected, and this history may be particularly helpful in learning what mistakes can be avoided and how.

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[69] The struggle against heteronormativity could equally be said to apply to "straight" individuals who do not meet the normative standard, such as heterosexuals who choose to remain single throughout their lives or those who form a lifelong partnership but eschew marriage, or even those who marry but choose not to have children.

As discussed above, in Butler's call for "cultural translation," she suggests that there is much to be learned from border-crossings and non-dominant perspectives. I argue that solidary allies should take an approach similar to what Ann Ferguson calls "expanding the self-horizon,"[70] which means learning new ways of thinking and knowing that were formerly invisible to us.[71] Expanding the self-horizon requires "border-crossing" or "world-traveling":[72] placing oneself into new and unfamiliar contexts in which one's own identity and way of life are not the presumed "norm" or center. (Such "border-crossing" might involve reading a book, living in a foreign country, watching a movie, participating in an academic forum, attending a social event, or even just speaking with someone, where the life-experiences and background presupposed or foregrounded are very different from one's own.)

The continual practice of "border-crossing" illuminates the blind areas in one's former perspective, enabling one to see new aspects of reality that are eclipsed by dominant discourses and perspectives. No longer constrained by these epistemological limits, we can wield new critical conceptual tools to analyze and de-mystify the messages and presumptions of the dominant culture. Crucially, the transformed perspective resulting from the individual practice of ethical solidarity enables us to imagine and implement new possibilities for restructuring society—a society that will be at once more ethically attuned and more fully just. By valuing and validating the experiences and

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[70] Ann Ferguson, "Can I Choose Who I Am?," in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: explorations in feminist philosophy*, ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 108-126.

[71] Similar calls for this kind of self-transformative work have been made by Carol C. Gould, "Transnational Solidarities," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 38, no. 1 (March 2007): 148-164, and Brenda Lyshaug, "Solidarity without "Sisterhood"? Feminism and the Ethics of Coalition Building," *Politics & Gender* 2, no. 01 (2006): 77-100.

[72] See Maria Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 77-102.

perspectives of those who have been excluded from the category of the human, (because they did not meet the dominant expectations of the "norm"), we enrich our understanding of what humanity truly looks like and expand our resources for creating a genuinely just society and fully ethical relationships.

Butler argues that theory is transformative; it is transformative work and has transformative effects. She acknowledges, however, that theory is not sufficient by itself for social and political transformation. Nussbaum acknowledges that her own theory presupposes extensive benevolence, and she admits that in *Frontiers of Justice* she does not show whether or how the required extension of sentiment is possible. In response to Butler's concerns, the theorization of ethical solidarity can show how the ethical and political actions required of us are transformative for both individuals and society. The practice of ethical solidarity also elaborates a project and process of extending the sentiments in such a way as to substantively support Nussbaum's theoretical goals.

In the next chapter, I describe in detail the process of the personal transformation of consciousness called for by ethical solidarity, explaining the ways in which it performatively expands the category of the human by undermining harmful structures of normativity in culture and society—thus accomplishing the expansion of the category of the human that I have argued is required by the theories of both Nussbaum and Butler.

CHAPTER 2

ETHICAL SOLIDARITY AND PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

[O]ur willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human.

Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*

In the last chapter, I discussed the peculiar anxiety that a number of contemporary philosophers, Martha Nussbaum and Judith Butler among them, seem to share: a fear of the ethical life as potentially burdensome to the point of harm for individuals. Their motivations for fearing the ethical life vary, with Nussbaum concerned that well-meaning individuals will suffer harm to their own flourishing for the sake of fulfilling their ethical responsibility to others[1] and Butler concerned that the turn to ethics is an escape from political action and inevitably involves violence towards the self, by the self.[2] In this chapter, I elaborate a practice of ethical solidarity as self-transformation that I believe can effectively address these concerns about the potential harms of ethical life. In particular, I hope to show that the practice of ethical solidarity helps to achieve the integration of ethical life and humane life into a healthy whole for individuals while simultaneously expanding the possibilities for human flourishing for all.

On my view, the transformations of self and consciousness that result from the practice of ethical solidarity are beneficial, rather than harmful, to the flourishing of the individual as well as to the flourishing of human beings in general. I affirm with Aristotle and the tradition of virtue ethics that the pursuit of virtue is not only proper

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[1] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 306-10.

[2] Judith Butler, "Ethical Ambivalence," in *The Turn to Ethics*, ed. Marjorie B. Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 15-28.

insofar as it enables one to fulfill one's ethical responsibilities, but also insofar as it makes one a better person in a way that leads to happiness. Ethical solidarity as a virtuous practice plays an important role in negotiating our social ties and aligning our interpersonal interactions with justice.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, Nussbaum's main concern with placing responsibility for promoting the human capabilities on individuals rather than institutions is that such responsibility will be an obstacle to the flourishing of the responsible individual. This concern leads her to want to bracket ethical life away from "the rest" of human life in order to preserve space for diverse forms of human flourishing. On her view, institutions are delegated responsibility for promoting the human capabilities in the political sphere so that space can be retained for diverse forms of flourishing human life in the private sphere. That is, rather than place responsibility for securing the minimum of human capabilities on all human *persons*, she places the burden squarely on the shoulders of *institutions* primarily out of a concern that "the injunction to promote human capabilities [would devour] the life of each person, removing personal projects, concerns, and space to such an extent that nobody at all had the chance to lead a truly human life."[3]

Although it is clear that institutional involvement is a necessity in the promotion of human capabilities, I argue that Nussbaum goes too far in viewing individuals as having delegated their duties to institutions. She writes, "We can see that this division between the institutional and the ethical corresponds to a familiar distinction, in liberal (and especially political-liberal) theory, between the political sphere and the spheres of people's own personal (or shared) comprehensive conceptions of value."[4] But such a

[3] Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 309.
[4] Ibid., 310.

division between political life that is concerned with ethical responsibilities and private life that is free of specific duties towards others constitutes a rejection of the nature of our constant and inescapable vulnerability towards one another[5] and illustrates Nussbaum's lack of attention to the significance of the social imaginary for human flourishing.[6]

Without the transformation of consciousness on an individual level, instantiated through the collective social level, the narrow normative structures of the social imaginary will remain firmly in place—structures which perpetuate a series of grave harms on those individuals and groups who do not fit the norm. Political changes and institutional action are only partly and incompletely able to influence the social imaginary in ethically productive ways. Ironically then, given Nussbaum's view, it is *individual consciousnesses* that must be transformed in order for the structures of the social imaginary to change in such a way as to open up greater possibilities for diverse flourishing human lives. I spend the bulk of the latter part of this chapter describing what particular transformations of consciousness are needed for the practice of ethical solidarity and the promotion of human flourishing.

Along with the transformation of consciousness leading to greater understanding and recognition of diverse others, individuals in solidarity will subsequently need to vacate or reject their positions of privilege in unjust structures of power before the prevailing structure can be reconstructed to support a greater diversity of flourishing human life. In other words, transformation of consciousness alone is insufficient for solidary practice. As a relation that mediates between the individual and the collective,

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[5] See Chapter 1, p. 11-13.

[6] In Chapter 3, I will discuss further my rejection of this separation of political and private ethical responsibility in the context of repudiating the (liberal) embrace of the notion of "tolerance" for diverse others.

ethical solidarity requires not only internal, personal transformations of consciousness but also action in the world in support of the human flourishing of others. When the transformation of consciousness is accomplished that leads to recognition of unjust structures of power and privilege and their effect on the oppressed, the natural and necessary resulting step for solidary allies is action in support of justice and against those structures.

The practice of ethical solidarity avoids the burnout and "devouring" of personal projects, concerns, and space that concern Nussbaum[7] because of the status of solidarity as a relationship that mediates between the individual and the collective. That is, rather than being solely a personal, individual responsibility, the responsibility for ensuring human flourishing by promoting the minimum of human capabilities for all is a collective endeavor that is enacted one individual at a time. All of us, as individual members of the collective of human beings, *share* responsibility for promoting the human capabilities. We have the responsibility to do what we can as individuals to promote human flourishing. What this does not mean is that each individual person has the responsibility, all alone as an individual, to secure the human capabilities for all others.

Because *ought* implies *can*, clearly there can be no individual practical responsibility for securing all of the conditions necessary for the minimum of human capabilities to be available to all human persons. But as a collective of individuals, we absolutely can secure the conditions necessary for the minimum of human capabilities to be available to all human persons. Therefore each individual, as a member of the collective, has the responsibility to promote the human capabilities. Asking what the

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[7] Ibid., 309. See also Susan Wolf, "The Moral of Moral Luck," in *Setting the Moral Compass: Essays by Women Philosophers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 113-127

specific limits are on each individual's responsibility is a question without a standard answer, given the variety of situations of need that any individual will encounter as well as the extent and variety of resources that any individual will be able to draw upon to respond to another's need, including the relation of both the helping individual and the needy individual to the web of social relations and institutions surrounding them both.

One might argue at this point that the notion of collective responsibility here is subject to the same problems I criticize Nussbaum for when assigning responsibility for promoting human flourishing to institutions. In other words, one might ask: why does solidarity as a collective practice not suffer the same drawbacks as the "collective" of institutional responsibility? I understand the answer to this question as hinging upon the directionality of responsibility. Responsibility for promoting human flourishing in institutions—and responsibility *in general* in institutional contexts—is top-down. If I want to know who is ultimately responsible for the action of an institution, the proper answer is to look "upward" in the institutional hierarchy for the person or position with the most power. Responsibility in institutional contexts lies most strongly with the one who authorized the action, made the decision, and commanded the resources of the institution to take steps to enact that decision. Hence, for example, calls for accountability for war crimes proceed up the chain of command in pursuit of the high-ranking officers who authorized the acts, rather than stopping with the individual soldiers who physically perpetrated the crimes.

In contrast, ethical solidarity understands responsibility for promoting human flourishing as resting centrally with the individual actor—the directionality of responsibility is "bottom-up." It may help to think of the distribution of responsibility

among the collective of solidarity individuals as akin to a team of rowers pulling a boat over the water in a race. Each rower is responsible for pulling the oar with as much force and dexterity as she or he is able, and each one of the team members relies upon each and every one of the others to pull their oars with as much force and dexterity as they are able. The boat will only go as fast as the team is able to carry it if every team member contributes to the best of her or his ability. If, on the other hand, one of the team members were to give less than her or his best effort, or even stop altogether, the boat would continue to race forward. The difference, however, is that each of the other rowers will have to work harder in order to maintain the speed of the boat to the best of their ability. In fact, without that additional rower, it will be impossible for the team to row the boat as quickly as the team is capable of rowing, since the boat will always move faster given the best effort of more individuals. Depending on the abilities of each individual rower, the effect that any one or more rower's quitting will have on the speed and forward progress of the boat will vary, but there will inevitably come a point at which the progress of the boat will falter for lack of sufficient team effort, because one rower (or perhaps even a small number of rowers) will be incapable of propelling the boat alone.

If we consider the forward progress and speed of the boat in this metaphor as representative of the promotion of human flourishing for all people, and the contributions of each rower to that progress as the contributions of individuals to human flourishing, it is perhaps easier to see how responsibility lies directly with each individual person, but spreads out over a unified collective. Although the individual by herself or himself is incapable of producing all of the necessary conditions for universal human flourishing to

be met, the creation of those conditions hinges upon each and every individual taking up responsibility for ensuring the minimum acceptable level of human flourishing for others. This individual responsibility is crucial in the context of the struggle against conditions of oppression, which so often are organized in such a way as to be invisible to the individuals that are thereby privileged.

Taking Responsibility for One's (Invisible/Unconscious) Privileges

One of the most sinister ways in which oppressive norms are reinforced is by remaining invisible to the people governed by them. If one believes that certain social situations or constraints are natural, biological, or "just the way things are"—rather than a set of contingent circumstances susceptible to change—one is less likely to resist the forces that maintain the status quo.[8] In particular, oppressive systems of power that govern social norms are *configured* or *naturalized* to hide from privileged people (as well as from the disadvantaged) the fact that they are privileged. For example, heterosexual couples experience the privilege—without realizing that it is a privilege—of publicly displaying their romantic affection (holding hands, kissing, even merely standing or sitting very close to their loved one) without fear of provoking disgusted looks, hateful remarks, or physical violence from those around them. Non-heterosexual couples are routinely denied this privilege in most of American society. Given such insidious invisibility of privilege and oppression, individuals who wish to act in ethical solidarity with others against multiple oppressions must become aware of the systems of power and

[8] For example, (recalling Harvard's former President Lawrence Summers) if one understands women to be inherently or biologically inferior to men in the areas of math, science, and engineering, one is far less likely to question whether institutional or social barriers are in fact causing differences in ability between genders.

privilege in which they are enmeshed. Without an understanding of these systems, we are unable to practice ethical solidarity effectively due to a lack of awareness of the social realities informed by privilege.[9]

Because we are all—at some time, in some context, with regard to some relationship or interaction—privileged with respect to some identity category, the solidarity-practice of learning to recognize privilege is relevant for all people, not just those we routinely assume to have privileged identities (white, male, upper-class, heterosexual, etc.—although learning to recognize privilege is of special importance for these groups). Privilege is not a static or stable characteristic; it adapts to the context in which it is mobilized. For example, a gay man may be privileged with respect to his gender at his workplace, but when he is identified as queer in the context of leaving a gay bar, he may experience harassment and discrimination unmitigated by his privileged gender.[10] Further, because privilege is dynamic and multivalent, a critical analysis of it requires understanding the intersectionality of oppressions—the way in which the experience of having multiple oppressed identity categories is more complex than simply "adding" oppressions.

The perspective and practice of ethical solidarity require that systems of privilege be analyzed and revealed by occupying perspectives "outside" of such systems. Further, ethical solidarity requires that people who are recipients of systemic privilege reject that

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[9] For a sustained consideration of the invisibility of privilege, see Michael Kimmel and Abby Ferber, *Privilege: A Reader* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), especially the introduction.

[10] I do not mean to imply that all non-heterosexual sexual identities occupy the same plane in the spectrum of privileged versus disadvantages identities. In particular, lesbian and gay individuals generally experience greater privilege than bisexual, transgender, or transsexual individuals. (Even more so, bisexuals in an opposite-gender relationship may access certain heterosexual privileges because the situation renders their bisexuality socially illegible.) For a recent political example of the disparity among LGBTQ sexualities, consider the struggle (and ultimate failure) to include "gender expression" as a protected category in the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA).

privilege and the system that unjustly distributes it. Therefore, individuals who make it part of their identity to act in solidarity with human others who are oppressed—in other words, solidary allies—must learn to identify and reject their own unearned privilege in whatever ways are possible. Indeed, this process of coming to recognize one's own privilege is itself part of the practice of ethical solidarity.

One cannot simply declare that one will no longer accept one's privileges, however. Because the privilege is distributed systemically, as a matter of course in daily life, the rejection of privilege often entails *using* that privilege in the service of dismantling the normative system of power that sustains it. Though the identification of one's own privilege is a requirement of ethical solidarity, this is not to say that doing so is easy. History has often shown that the social, cultural, and political structures designed to make privilege invisible to the privileged are frustratingly intractable.[11]

The practice of ethical solidarity calls for the sustained tension of holding oneself open to alternate ways of viewing the world—of opening one's eyes to one's own privilege and the norms with which one is comfortable. This shift in epistemic vision is often inaugurated by an encounter with those who are denied such privileges. Being a solidary ally means struggling against adopting (or unreflectively maintaining) the perspective of dominant paradigms. Transformations of consciousness will be important for all solidary allies, but particularly so for those who possess systemically privileged

[11] On my view, the experience of "backlash" that accompanies most transformative social movements is strong evidence for this intractability. Another example of the invisibility of privilege is the calcification of the abortion debate over the issue of "choice." The abortion debate has essentially become a fight over the yes-or-no answer to "should a woman be able to choose whether or not to have a baby?" Activists for reproductive justice, many of whom advocate particularly for women of color, have rightly pointed out that the centering of "choice" ignores and erases (among other things) issues of *access* to abortion. That is, even where abortion is legal, many poor women lack the financial means to obtain one. Were abortion outlawed throughout the U.S., rich women would still have the means to procure a relatively safe illegal abortion.

identity positions (e.g. – white, male, heterosexual, Western, able-bodied, etc.). The transformation of consciousness necessary for the work of ethical solidarity involves the displacement of one's own familiar world-view. Such a displacement of self requires a reevaluation of the power relations that benchmark the subjective experience of "flourishing" for privileged and oppressed subjects. With reference to Nussbaum's concerns about leaving space for private flourishing, one must also ask what social circumstances condition the subjective experience or evaluation of one's own flourishing, since the standards of subjective evaluation for the systemically privileged will undoubtedly differ from those of the systemically oppressed, given their different social locations and the resources available to support the flourishing of their private/personal lives. One must come to the realization that one's knowledge and perspective are fundamentally informed by the structures of power that govern social life. The invisibility of privilege becomes an *ethical* problem to the extent that one could assign responsibility to those who are (unknowingly) privileged for maintaining their privileged position in an unjust system of power.

Jean Harvey's conception of "civilized oppression" helps to explain the invisibility of privilege I am concerned with here and the responsibility that nevertheless impinges upon individuals who are privileged at the expense of oppressed others without either knowing it or having acted in any particularly vicious or intentional way to support that oppression.

> [Civilized oppression] is the most pervasive form of oppression in Western societies and by its nature, it is hard to perceive. … Much of what is done that sustains the oppression is socialized into the contributing agents and is a matter of habitual behavior. … In a literal sense they are

> unaware of their actions. Becoming aware involves perceptual skills they do not yet have and which they so far have no motivation to acquire.[12]

The actions that sustain conditions of oppression are cumulative in the same way that actions which could sustain human flourishing are cumulative, and individual responsibility therefore operates similarly for both situations. Both involve small, daily habits and entrenched patterns, the sum of which can systemically either harm or help others.

Because so much of what sustains civilized oppression is a matter of habitual behavior despite "good intentions," one can easily see the crucial role for virtue in transforming one's habits from those that support oppression to those that support human flourishing. The habits that will be targeted for transformation by the virtuous practice of ethical solidarity are those that are often unconscious (such as implicit bias). Therefore a good portion of the personal practice of ethical solidarity takes place on the epistemological level as a transformation of consciousness.

The suggestion that epistemological transformations of consciousness will be crucial for an ethics that supports livable human lives has been addressed before by Judith Butler. In 2000, Butler expressed concerns about the turn to ethics and away from politics because of the potential for ethical violence due to the harms of narrow normativity.[13] More recently, however, she has expressed hope for the significance of ethics in the Hegelian tradition as a question of recognition.[14] In affirmation of the inherently and inescapably social nature of human being and the emergence of the human subject through social patterns of recognition, Butler articulates a conception of ethics as

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[12] Jean Harvey, "Moral Solidarity and Empathetic Understanding: The Moral Value and Scope of the Relationship," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 38, no. 1 (March 2007): 31-2.
[13] Butler, "Ethical Ambivalence."
[14] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New: Fordham University Press, 2005).

consisting in "asking the question 'Who are you?' and continuing to ask it without any expectation of a full or final answer."[15] My own view of the foundational ethical stance is in harmony with Butler's as she articulates it here. Ultimately I hope to describe a critical perspective on the question of "the human" and the conditions necessary for human flourishing as one of an always-deferred *telos*.[16]

For Butler, ethics is centrally about the process of critique—in particular, the critique of the social structures that condition the possibility of the emergence (the "intelligibility") of human subjects. There is "no self-making outside of the norms that orchestrate the possible forms that a subject may take. The practice of critique then exposes the limits of the historical scheme of things, the epistemological and ontological horizon within which subjects come to be at all."[17] Butler's concern with epistemology and the recognition of specifically *human* subjects coincides with my own concerns about the role of the transformation of consciousness as a practice of ethical solidarity.

When one undertakes a process of self-transformation as a solidary ally, one undergoes a process which is centrally about *risking oneself* with respect to one's own intelligibility as a subject. If, as Butler argues, recognition of one's full personhood by others is fundamental to what it means both to be a human being and to have a livable life, then transformations of consciousness that work against and do not harmonize with prevailing social structures will impede the recognition-as-human of solidary allies who make common cause with oppressed, "unintelligible" subjects. That is, solidary allies will risk losing their humanity, as humanity is narrowly defined according to oppressive social norms. Only through the proliferation of such risking of selves, however, will

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[15] Ibid., 43.
[16] This will be the central question addressed in Chapter 4.
[17] Ibid., 17.

those harmful norms become destabilized enough that they may then begin to be restructured in ways that are more conducive to human flourishing for all.

Such risks to selfhood and the structure of the social imaginary that governs the intelligibility of human subjects are, as I have argued, inaccessible or invisible from Nussbaum's perspective. Risking oneself in such a fashion is an act that is only available at the level of individual action and consciousness—it is not a risk that can be taken as an institution insofar as institutions are not properly human subjects. Furthermore, risking one's own intelligibility is a profound act of solidarity with those whose lives and subjectivities are already made unintelligible given the current configuration of social power structures.[18] Butler's view harmonizes with my claim that individual responsibility lies at the heart of ethical action against the structures of oppression, even civilized oppression. "I am interrupted by my own social origin, and so have to find a way to take stock of who I am in a way that makes clear that I am authored by what precedes and exceeds me, and that *this in no way exonerates me from having to give an account of myself*."[19]

With Harvey, Butler understands the operation of privilege as largely invisible to those who are privileged, but that this invisibility is no reason to excuse the privileged from responsibility for maintaining conditions that contribute to the systemic oppression of others. "We are used to thinking that we can be responsible only for that which we have done, that which can be traced to our intentions, our deeds. … Rather, my capacity to be *acted upon* implicates me in a relation of responsibility."[20] As I have argued above,

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[18] I will describe the process of making such risks later in this chapter, in the context of "transgressing" against the "map of power."
[19] Ibid., 82, emphasis mine.
[20] Ibid., 88.

it is our shared human vulnerability—our capacity to be acted upon—that grounds the ethical relation and which serves as the occasion for inaugurating a practice of ethical solidarity between human subjects. The transformation of our understanding of our responsibilities to others with regard to the social structuring of power and privilege is one of three distinct but interrelated transformations that I see as at the heart of the personal practice of ethical solidarity.

On my view, the transformations of consciousness at the individual level that constitute the practice of ethical solidarity are: the transformation of responsibilities (as discussed above), the transformation of values, and the transformation of epistemological horizons. I see my work in elaborating these transformations as a contribution to recent scholarship on the relationship of virtue theory and issues of oppression, particularly in conversation with Lisa Tessman's work on burdened virtues.[21] I also see this chapter as offering a contribution to work on the concept of solidarity, both in terms of bringing attention to the role of virtue in the practice of solidarity as well as the unique function of recognition (as Butler understands it) for being counted as human.[22]

The personal transformations of consciousness called for by ethical solidarity performatively expand the category of the human by undermining harmful structures of normativity in culture and society, thus accomplishing the expansion of the category of the human that I have argued is required by the theories of both Nussbaum and Butler. Transformations in support of the full, robust recognition-as-human of the Other are

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[21] Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, USA, 2005)

[22] While Sally Scholz gives an excellent history of theoretical work and the state of contemporary scholarship on solidarity in her 2008 book, *Political Solidarity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), she notably makes no reference at all to Martha Nussbaum's work in *Frontiers of Justice* nor to any of Judith Butler's work. I see my contribution to the theoretical literature on solidarity as centrally in showing how these two figures contribute significant insights to the conversation.

closely related to past scholarly reflections on the role of self-transformation for the alleviation of oppression. In particular, much prior work on liberatory personal transformations has occurred in the context of feminist anti-racist work.[23]

Taking these conversations about self-transformation in resistance to race-related oppression as a starting point, I attempt to elaborate a virtuous practice of self-transformation that serves as the internal anchor and instantiation of ethical solidarity. My particular contribution, however, will focus on describing an internal practice of resistance to oppressions that flow from heteronormativity and hinge upon power differentials related to sexuality and gender expression.

Responsibilities and Individual versus Collective Human Flourishing

Tessman's recent book, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*, gives an account of the ways in which the conditions of oppression skew the possibilities for developing the traditional virtues that lead to a flourishing life for those who are oppressed.[24] While Tessman explores the impact of oppression on the virtues and flourishing of oppressed people, I see my work on ethical solidarity as a complementary counter-point exploring the impact of oppression on the virtues and flourishing of the privileged.[25] Introducing the notion of ethical solidarity to the relation between the

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[23] See, for example, Ann Ferguson, "Can I Choose Who I Am?," in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: explorations in feminist philosophy*, ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 108-126, Linda Martin Alcoff, "What Should White People Do?," *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 6-26, Elly Bulkin, *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism / Pratt, Minnie Bruce.* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Long Haul Press, 1984), and Maria Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003).

[24] Tessman, *Burdened Virtues*.

[25] I do not want to draw a strong distinction here between "the privileged" as a distinct group from "the oppressed." I see privilege as a dynamic property that operates differently relative to a variety of situations, identities, and contexts.

virtues and situations of oppression naturally gives rise to the question of the communal nature of our flourishing—how can I flourish when others suffer?

Tessman wrestles with this question herself and concludes that a traditional Aristotelian approach to eudaimonism is unable to account for the moral problem raised by individual flourishing gotten at the expense of or in indifference to the suffering of others:

> [M]oral goodness requires a pursuit of not just my own well-being, and not just the well-being of those whose well-being I depend on, but also the well-being of those whose very lack of well-being may have been a condition of my privileges. If one finds oneself living the good life while others' lives are systemically set up to be wretched, it is a mistake to think that moral goodness lies just in the pursuit of one's own flourishing.[26]

Returning to Harvey's notion of civilized oppression, Tessman seems to agree that the privileged are ethically responsible for or implicated within the conditions that maintain their privilege, even despite "good intentions" or their lack of awareness of those conditions. Tessman adds, moreover, that the moral character of the privileged is damaged or vicious insofar as one does not view the well-being of others—particularly those others "whose very lack of well-being may have been a condition of my privileges"—as intrinsically related to and even a precondition of one's own well-being.

Tessman also sees the problem of the relation between the privileged and the oppressed as partly one of the outlook or emotional reaction that the privileged have towards the oppressed; namely, the privileged often show *indifference* towards the suffering of the oppressed. "Believing in one's own moral goodness regardless of its actual absence is facilitated by what I think of as a 'meta-vice,' namely, indifference or, more specifically, indifference to the (preventable and unjust) suffering of certain

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[26] Tessman, *Burdened Virtues*, 76.

others."[27] Tessman's insight here reinforces the point that what is required[28] ethically for the conditions of the possibility of human flourishing for all is a shift in the character of the privileged, particularly in terms of their view of and concern for oppressed others. This character must be expressed in part in terms of "vision" of a certain kind.

Despite the clear need for transformations of character from the standpoint of virtue ethics, Tessman takes a somewhat skeptical view towards the possibilities of a (feminist) politics of personal transformation. That is, Tessman sees the potentialities of a politics of personal transformation as extremely limited, especially for the oppressed, because so much of the cause of the conditions of oppression prevents the oppressed from altering their condition solely by means of self-transformations—the problem with oppressions is that they are *systemic*. It is this skepticism towards a politics of personal transformation that leads her to elaborate a notion of "burdened virtues" in the first place—character traits that are not straightforwardly beneficial to the individual and which arise due to the need to cope with conditions of oppression.

Tessman's view is that the conditions of oppression force the oppressed to develop character traits which may be virtuous insofar as they enable their bearers to survive despite those conditions, but which are otherwise potentially harmful or vicious character traits.

> [I]f not only the way in which one's character is formed but also how much it can be changed is subject to moral luck, particularly the bad luck of being affected by systems of oppression that can damage one's self by creating conflicts between one's dispositions and one's own liberatory principles, then one cannot just *will* one's dispositions to change.[29]

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[27] Ibid., 77.
[28] Necessary, but not sufficient.
[29] Tessman, *Burdened Virtues*, 12.

I agree with Tessman that, although transformations of character are necessary for liberatory struggles, such transformations are constrained by the social conditions that limit—particularly for those who are systemically oppressed—the ways in which one is allowed to construct oneself in relation to others. I argue that Tessman's skepticism about the effectiveness of a politics of personal transformation comes from her understanding that change in character cannot happen independently of the transformation of the conditions of oppression, and I want to argue instead that solidarity becomes a cardinal virtue for such social transformation.

I see my contribution to the problems Tessman is working on as squarely about the changes that must be made on the side of those who are privileged in order to secure the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing for others. That is, ethical solidarity provides a way of understanding how individuals who are privileged can take up their proper ethical responsibility for—and productively contribute to—the well-being of diverse others. Such vision of one's own responsibility is attained through a daily internal as well as interactive practice of de-centering the self—a practice which I explore in depth in the latter sections of this chapter. Somewhat in contrast to Tessman, then, given my focus on privileged subjects, I argue that a politics of personal transformation is absolutely critical for liberatory struggles. Although transformations of self in support of ethical solidarity are relevant for all human beings, such personal transformations will have greater beneficial effect on the social imaginary when undertaken by privileged individuals, rather than by those who are oppressed, given the nature of the power dynamics involved.

Furthermore, Tessman's assertions that what is lacking in the privileged is a sufficient sense of investment and interest in the situation of the oppressed reinforces my contention that what is at issue is not only a matter of the sentiments—that is, not only an issue of indifference or uncaring—but also centrally a matter of epistemology. What knowledge, combined with a virtuous degree of empathy, is required in order for individuals occupying privileged standpoints to come to realize their (unjust) position relative to others and then act to rectify the injustice?

Ann Ferguson tackles many of these questions in her essay, "Can I Choose Who I Am? And How Would that Empower Me? Gender, Race, Identities and the Self."[30] Ferguson argues that "any theory that purports to explain the way these [unjust] systems [of oppression] work and the way oppressive social inequalities are maintained must not be so framed as to imply that those who benefit from them are not free to change them, otherwise they would not be morally culpable for their ongoing part in perpetuating the system."[31] Because oppressive systems are set up in ways specifically designed to restrict the freedoms of the oppressed, it is—crucially—the privileged who are in the position to make the most dramatic changes to that system, and who are therefore *responsible* for making or not making such changes. Ferguson concludes that the relevant action for responsible privileged subjects calls for transformations of self—transformations that, I argue, form the substance of the *intra*-personal practice of ethical solidarity.

The fundamental issue here is that the transformations of social systems, individual and collective consciousnesses, and interpersonal relationships that would

[30] Ferguson, "Can I Choose Who I Am?".
[31] Ibid., 108.

undermine systems of oppression and assist in liberatory struggles are changes that put the subjectivities of the privileged at risk. Ferguson sees human selves as constituted through social systems of meaning: "subjectivity is not atomistic but formed and maintained through social relations of bodies to each other that create and sustain meanings in something like Wittgensteinian 'forms of life'."[32] The identities that we maintain as selves are therefore thoroughly social identities predicated on existing but malleable systems of meaning. Butler would say that such systems of meaning condition what sorts of human subjectivities will be "readable" or "intelligible." When privileged subjects behave in ways that do not conform to social norms, they risk their coherence or intelligibility within the social system of meaning.

I argue that the habitual behaviors and concrete actions that the privileged may take in resistance to their privileged social positions only become *possible* as actions due to an epistemological shift that *reveals the power relations* between the privileged and the oppressed in such a way as to show the responsibility that the privileged have for maintaining those relations. To begin with, then, the situation faced by any privileged person who is a potential solidary ally is not just a matter of good intention but also one of a lack of knowledge—an epistemological problem.

My characterization of the initial difficulty for any potential solidary ally as one of *knowledge*, rather than one of emotion or empathy, differs notably from past work on solidarity that takes empathy or sympathy as the central problem.[33] It is not my intention

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[32] Ibid., 112.

[33] See, for example, Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Brenda Lyshaug, "Solidarity without "Sisterhood"? Feminism and the Ethics of Coalition Building," *Politics & Gender* 2, no. 01 (2006): 77-100, Jodi Dean, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), and Sandra Lee Bartky, *Sympathy and Solidarity: and Other Essays* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002).

to suggest that concerns about proper empathy or sympathy are not significant for work on solidarity—I do not think that epistemological information alone would be sufficient to motivate solidary action—but it seems to me that, given the nature of "civilized oppression," the question of epistemology has been comparatively neglected.

Ferguson makes a unique contribution to the problem of the relevant knowledge that the privileged seem to lack that would alert them to their responsibility for the oppression of others by introducing the concept of what she calls the "self-horizon:"

> The self-horizon is that part of one's social and bodily behavior, motives, and their implications that remain unknown to one, either because they are unconscious or invisible. This invisible horizon of my conscious self-processes … refers to the social meanings of my relations to others that are obscured from my awareness because of my social position of privilege or oppression. For those who wish to become political allies of those oppressed by gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, *enlarging one's conscious incorporation of such aspects of one's horizon is an important part of a reconstitutive self-strategy to become profeminist, antiracist, anti-Semitic, antiprejudiced, or progay*. That is, it is important to understand the existence of this horizon and to take concrete steps to receive feedback on these hidden meanings. One way this can be done is by accepting personal confrontations with those historically oppressed. Another is to take time to study the history of the relevant social relations as they shape one's own social context, and from this vantage point reflect on the import of one's actions.[34]

If the privileged are to have any responsibility for their privilege, Ferguson argues, it must lie in their decision whether or not to act to reconstitute their selves on the level of the self-horizon. Because there are social meanings of my relations to others that I do not see—particularly if I occupy a position of privilege in an oppressive system—then it is my responsibility to seek ways of extending that horizon in such a way as to bring the relevant facts to light.

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[34] Ferguson, "Can I Choose Who I Am?," 117, emphasis mine.

This sort of extension of the self-horizon requires reflection and reflexive critical work on the self—the transformation of consciousness. Furthermore, because the epistemological problem is fundamentally one of the knowledge that one lacks about oneself and which one does not have immediate access to through sheer force of will, such critical reflexive and reflective work must take place in the context of interaction with (diverse) others. Ferguson sees this work as happening in the context of chosen "oppositional communities" that "are networks of people who share a critique of the existing order and who choose to identify with and engage in some material and/or political practices to show forth this critique."[35]

On my view, the most constructive response to the issues raised by Tessman, Ferguson, and Butler is through a solidarity approach that *risks the self* in its social intelligibility by de-centering the normative discourses and practices that keep oppression in place, and this is accomplished through a sustained and conscientious attitude of critique and self-refashioning. This is, in effect, to regard solidarity as a virtue whose work is directed outward but which also requires a new orientation inwardly, to the self in its core loyalties. Butler writes:

> Ethics, we might say, gives rise to critique or, rather, cannot proceed without it, since we have to become knowing about the ways in which our actions are taken up by the already-constituted social world and what consequences will follow from our acting in certain ways. Deliberation takes place in relation to a concrete set of historical circumstances, but more importantly, in relation to an understanding of the patterned way in which action is regulated within the contemporary social horizon.[36]

Transformation of the self therefore requires an understanding and critique of both the self-horizon and the social horizon that conditions the emergence and intelligibility of

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[35] Ibid., 121.
[36] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 110.

that self. Such critical de-centering happens, crucially, both internally through the monitoring of one's thought-processes as well as interpersonally through action in the world. Actions of self-transformation in the service of ethical solidarity must contain both aspects to be effective. Because we are all conditioned by the culture and social fabric that shapes us as subjects, it is nearly inescapable that some of our thought-processes will have been shaped to conform to and implicitly treat as standard many overly narrow social norms despite our best intentions. So, for example, as a solidary ally I must not only act to confront other people who exhibit homophobic attitudes, but I must also examine my own thought-processes to determine what sorts of heteronormative assumptions I may be making about the people around me.

Solidary allies risk their coherence or intelligibility by defying harmful normative habitual behavior patterns that are "required" by systems of domination for individuals in their social locations. When we violate such mandated behavioral patterns, we risk the intelligibility of our selves. Again, to quote Butler:

> If, according to Foucault, new modes of subjectivity become possible, this does not follow from the fact that there are individuals with especially creative capacities. Such modes of subjectivity are produced when the limiting conditions by which we are made prove to be malleable and replicable, when a certain self is risked in its intelligibility and recognizability in a bid to expose and account for the inhuman ways in which "the human" continues to be done and undone.[37]

It is not through especially careful or ingenious creative faculties that new possibilities for subjectivities are created, but rather through seeing the categories, the menu of available life-options, the shapes of human experience we are used to, break up and begin to re-signify in new ways. Such resignification is not within the complete control of the individual or even the community, but emerges as something new whose development is

[37] Ibid., 133.

unpredictable—a shared project which is entered into as a risk in the service of opening up new possibilities for intelligible, recognizable, and therefore livable human lives.

The very act of risking oneself as an expression of ethical solidarity aimed at recognition-as-human of the Other, moreover, is itself an expression of virtue:

> Sometimes the very unrecognizability of the other brings about a crisis in the norms that govern recognition. If and when, in an effort to confer or to receive a recognition that fails again and again, I call into question the normative horizon within which recognition takes place, this questioning is part of the desire for recognition, a desire that can find no satisfaction, and whose unsatisfiability establishes a critical point of departure for the interrogation of available norms. In Foucault's view, this opening calls into question the limits of established regimes of truth, and there *a certain risking of the self becomes, he claims, the sign of virtue*.[38]

In other words, the risking of the self is a virtue insofar as such risking is undertaken for the sake of attaining full human recognition of another, because as it stands, such recognition is undermined by the prevailing normative social landscape. It is a profound act of solidarity to risk one's own social and (therefore) subjective coherence in order to protest the lack of coherence or "intelligibility" of another. Such an act is virtuous in itself, while also requiring *practical wisdom* to recognize situations where such risks are applicable and effective and *courage* to undertake the risk in the first place.

Transforming Identifications and Values

In developing my account of ethical solidarity as a risking of the self through de-centering oneself in relation to social norms, I drew a great deal of inspiration and insight from the work of feminist theorist María Lugones. Lugones is perhaps most well-known for introducing the notion of "world"-traveling in her now-classic feminist essay,

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[38] Ibid., 24.

"Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling, and Loving Perception."[39] In that essay, Lugones argues that the social world is constructed in such a way that individuals occupy, live in, and move through different social "worlds," and that the practice of "world"-traveling—of meeting another person in a "world" that is not one's own—is a practice of loving perception that supports the struggle against multiple oppressions. I find the notion of "world" traveling particularly useful for solidary allies as a means to expanding one's self-horizon and seeking full recognition of the Other through the risking of one's self in unfamiliar social "worlds". In order to understand what is meant by "world"-traveling, however, it is first necessary to understand what Lugones means by a "world."

Lugones says that "[f]or something to be a 'world' in my sense, it has to be inhabited at present by some flesh and blood people. That is why it cannot be a utopia. It may also be inhabited by some imaginary people. It may be inhabited by people who are dead or people that the inhabitants of this 'world' met in some other 'world' and now have in this 'world' in imagination."[40] For Lugones, a "world" may be an actual society, both as that society is described or constructed according to its own norms and also as described or constructed from a resistant or idiosyncratic mode. On her view, these two constructions of the "same" society nevertheless constitute two different "worlds."[41] A "world" may be "a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society. It may be inhabited by just a few people. Some 'worlds' are bigger than others."[42]

Lugones' central argument is that the failure of identification with another is a failure of love, and that the experience of others' indifference has the potential to *undo* a

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[39] See Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 77-102.
[40] Ibid., 87.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 87-88.

person. She writes, "We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking. So traveling to each other's 'worlds' would enable us to *be* through loving each other."[43] Lugones here concurs with Butler that the lack of full social recognition of selves has the capacity to make a person unintelligible, and such unintelligibility undermines the possibility of the full emergence of the subject. (Properly speaking, I should say that Butler concurs with Lugones, since Lugones' work on this particular issue was published before Butler's, although Butler unfortunately does not reference Lugones in either *Undoing Gender* or *Giving an Account of Oneself*.)

Speaking in the context of white women's failure to identify with women of color, Lugones expresses concern over people whose "'world' and … integrity do not require me at all. There is no sense of self-loss in them for my own lack of solidity. But they rob me of my solidity through indifference, an indifference they can afford and that seems sometimes studied."[44] Like Tessman, Lugones identifies the indifference of the privileged towards the suffering of the oppressed as a central problem for the social recognition—and therefore the human flourishing—of people suffering the effects of systemic oppression. On my view, such indifference is best rectified through an approach towards relations with others that is based on ethical solidarity. If my own sense of flourishing is not partly invested in the well-being of (diverse) others, then I am exhibiting a form of vice (or a meta-vice, as Tessman would have it) that not only

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[43] Ibid., 86. In moments like these, I read strong affinities between Butler's work on "livable lives" in *Undoing Gender* and Lugones' work on "loving perception" in *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*. Unfortunately, it does not seem (judging by the works cited and the index) that Butler was thinking of Lugones, or even aware of her work, in writing *Undoing Gender*.

[44] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 83.

materially undermines the flourishing of (oppressed) others, but also and therefore harms my own ethical goodness. Adopting a practice of ethical solidarity towards others means that I am invested in the human flourishing of those others—a flourishing which requires my attention, recognition, and support. Furthermore, I cannot fully recognize certain others without traveling to their "worlds," so that I can see them with reference to the social norms that construct them as they understand themselves—particularly as they understand themselves *against* structures of domination.

I see Lugones' understanding of the relationship between identification, indifference, and love as reinforcing a concern for recognition *as human* of the other. Her call for identification across difference entails a new understanding of "coalition" and of identification itself. Rather than relying upon an experience of sameness to support identification with others, Lugones promotes "world"-traveling as an act of and a means to loving the other as a new form of identification across difference.

The shifts in our conception of identification initially advocated by Lugones in 1987 have been taken up more recently (2008) in Allison Weir's essay, "Global Feminism and Transformative Identity Politics."[45] Following Lugones, Weir calls for a process of "transformative identification" which involves "a recognition of the other that transforms our relation to each other, that shifts our relation from indifference to a recognition of interdependence."[46] Weir's aim is to challenge the prevailing model of identification as sameness, or as a question of "category," replacing it instead with a model of "identification-with," in which "our identifications, our commitments and

[45] Allison Weir, "Global Feminism and Transformative Identity Politics.," *Hypatia* 23, no. 4 (December 2008): 110-133.
[46] Ibid., 125.

values—our solidarities—shape our designations of identity."[47] Weir's insistence on a recognition of *interdependence* mirrors my claim that what is needed for ethical solidarity is the recognition that we are all—*qua* human—mutually vulnerable beings who depend on one another for the preservation of our flourishing. Weir's view also concurs with my own in that she argues that it is practices of *solidarity* that transform communities of identification, via transformations of self that cross power divides. Her view of the role of solidarity in creating new collective identities reinforces my view of the significance of ethical solidarity for creating the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing for all.

As Weir suggests here, new forms of identification across (categorical) difference through solidarity are possibly largely on the basis of shared values. One of the three key ways in which I see the practice of ethical solidarity bringing about transformations of self is through the transformation of values. Ethical solidarity is impossible without a change in motivation from self-interest to being other-regarding. Particularly because I understand ethical solidarity as having a special resonance for situations in which solidarity happens across differences in power or differences in "worlds," being other-regarding in the broadest sense is necessary if we are to escape from the categorical forms of identification (like identity politics) that Weir warns against.

Unlike identity politics, ethical solidarity is able to account for the active participation and commitment of people who are not directly subject to certain kinds of oppression and discrimination. Identity politics operates on the model that one is primarily (or only) interested in the social conditions affecting one's own categorically-understood identity, and therefore one ought to organize on the basis of such categories to

[47] Ibid., 111.

lobby (as self-interested groups) for change. A perspective of ethical solidarity accounts for the interest of individuals and even groups in the well-being of others who do not share in any of their own identity categories. I argue that solidary allies practice ethical solidarity out of a sense of shared ethical and political values; that is, they share a deep commitment to treating all human beings *as human* in social practice.[48] Solidary allies are therefore predisposed to act in solidarity with those who are being dehumanized or oppressed. As I see it, ethical solidarity is a motivating value—the kind of value we hold so closely that we orient our lives around it.

The transformation of values in conformity with ethical solidarity is a form of virtue insofar as it takes the well-being of diverse others as of central importance for one's own flourishing, as Tessman has argued. Many other theorists of solidarity have worked on the problem of empathy or proper emotional orientation, and I see their work as going a long way towards explaining the transformation of values in a person's character towards ethical solidarity.

I do not wish to suggest that transformations of values necessarily *precede* transformations of epistemological horizon. On my view, the three general forms of transformation of consciousness that are intrinsic to ethical solidarity (of values, of epistemological horizon, and of responsibilities) are distinct yet interrelated. Thus, a solidary ally could be motivated by her values to seek to extend her epistemological horizon in order to act in better ethical solidarity with diverse others. Or conversely, a solidary ally could have an experience that reveals something of the unjust power structures that position her as privileged in relation to others, and that new knowledge could then instigate the transformation of her values in support of the human flourishing

[48] See Chapter 1 for an in-depth discussion of the significance of being treated *as human*.

of the others whose well-being is currently sacrificed for the sake of her privilege. Regardless of the causal direction of the transformations, the experience of epistemological transformation through the de-centering of the self is crucial, on my view, in the creation of ethical solidarity.

Standpoint Epistemology and the Limits of Self-Knowledge

Feminist theorists like Donna Haraway, Helen Longino, Sandra Harding, and Patricia Hill Collins, among others, have criticized the traditional philosophical notion that an individual can access objective knowledge irrespective of his (and I use the pronoun conscientiously) identity or position in the world. Feminist critiques of objectivity and disembodied Cartesian knowers propose a different schema for understanding epistemology. Donna Haraway proposed what she called "situated knowledges," denouncing traditional claims to objectivity as the "view from nowhere" and asserting that all knowledge is inflected by the social and political location of the knower.[49] Feminists like Sandra Harding and Patricia Hill Collins have used this insight to suggest that "outsiders within"—those whose experiences, histories, and identities are marginalized by society but who are nevertheless compelled to work or function in that society (such as women of color domestic workers)—have "better" or more accurate access to knowledge than those who live comfortably within that society.[50]

This improved perspective is the result of what W. E. B. Du Bois called "double-consciousness:" the contradictory sense of being able to see oneself both through the eyes

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[49] See Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991).
[50] See Sandra G. Harding, *Whose Science?: Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991) and Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 10th ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000).

of one's oppressors and from one's own (marginalized) perspective.[51] Mirroring Du Bois, Elizabeth Spelman's reflections on "boomerang perception," in which "I look at you and come right back to myself," express the problematic epistemological situation of people at the "center" of an oppressive society.[52] (Black people are described as being "just like white people" but never the other way around. Notably, this same boomerang discourse is being mobilized to describe LGBTQ people today.)

Many of the alternative epistemologies proposed by feminist standpoint theorists are motivated by concerns about racism, though they do suggest that their theories also apply to issues of sexism and heterosexism. It is my intention to take up this gesture towards a wider application of feminist epistemologies, examining in detail the usefulness of feminist understandings of epistemology in looking at heterosexism and heteronormativity from the perspective of ethical solidarity. Feminist theories of epistemology are deeply concerned with the relationship of knowledge and power, and furthermore with the relationship of knowledge and power to ethics.

The previous chapter discussed the implications of social practice for the theoretical concept of who counts as human and argued that the social practice of ethical solidarity performatively humanizes the other. This chapter investigates the workings of ethical solidarity on the *intra*-personal level by exploring the limits of individual knowledge and the impact of such limits on one's ability to recognize others as human. The way an individual views her or his position in the world and the reliability of knowledge produced from that position critically informs the individual's ability to practice ethical solidarity effectively.

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[51] W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8.
[52] See Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 157 and Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1990).

Like Ferguson and Butler, Weir addresses the significance of coming to understand the limits of the self- and social horizon. "This kind of identification involves an opening up to difference—an expansion of the self, through an enlargement of one's horizons. This conception of identity is not atomistic but interconnected, because identity is understood only through relations to ideals, others, and multiple 'we's.'"[53] On Weir's view, the recognition that one is enmeshed in power relations with other human beings inaugurates a moment of re-identification of the self. Her model of identification also understands the network of social meanings as structuring the available means for recognition, just as Butler and Ferguson do.

I find it notable that each of these three theorists (Butler, Ferguson, and Weir) converge on the significance of *expanding one's horizons* as a means to transforming oneself in ways that resist oppression. I also find it notable that Tessman, Lugones, and Weir all converge on the idea that *indifference* on the part of the privileged is a significant problem for human flourishing under conditions of systemic oppression. On my view, the indifference of the privileged is an epistemological problem as well as a problem of empathy, and I see the solidary work of expanding one's horizons as directly combating the pattern of ignorance/indifference that perpetuates the conditions of civilized oppression.

Transforming Horizons and the Map of Power

I turn now to the second of the three general ways I understand the practice of ethical solidarity on the level of the transformation of individual consciousness. Such transformation takes place with regard to the *expansion of one's self-horizon*, via

[53] Weir, "Global Feminism and Transformative Identity Politics.," 125.

"world"-traveling and the help of oppositional communities, as a practice which directly combats the constellation of ignorance/indifference. As a solidary ally, particularly one who is privileged, one must undertake a critique of oneself and the social norms that structure one's own "world"(s) in order to come to understand the ways in which power operates to privilege some and oppress others. Expansions of the self-horizon will result, in particular, from lived encounters with diverse others achieved via "world"-traveling, undertaken with epistemological humility or a de-centering of oneself and one's own "world." Crucially, the transformation that results from the practice of such self- and social critique results in a coming-to-awareness of (at least some of) the habits that help sustain civilized oppression, and the proper response for solidary allies is thus the adjustment of such habits in support of the human flourishing of all.

Lugones is again helpful here in thinking about how to accomplish such transformations of epistemological standpoint with regard to power relations. Lugones claims that there can be multiple, even competing visions of the same space, situation, context, or action, and that an individual is capable of viewing any given situation either through the lens of "arrogant perception,"[54] *with* a framework that is oppressive, or with love, in resistance to domination. Lugones suggests we can think of the workings of normative power as a "map." This map is more complex than the classic center/margin dynamics described in much feminist theory.[55] Lugones invites us to imagine:

> All the roads and places are marked as places you may, must, or cannot occupy. Your life is spatially mapped by power. Your spot lies at the intersection of all the spatial venues where you may, must, or cannot live or move. … There is no "you" there except a person spatially and thus

[54] See Marilyn Frye, *Politics Of Reality - Essays In Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1983).
[55] See, for example, Harding, *Whose Science?* or Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984).

> relationally conceived through your functionality in terms of power. That you is understood as thoroughly socially constructed in terms of power. Thus, even if you is a spot and intersection of domination, and that gives you carte blanche as to where you may go, *you may not go there in resistance to domination*; that occupation of space is not mapped in this map. … And if "you" (always abstract "you") are one of the dominated, your movements are highly restricted and contained. *And there may not be any you there under certain descriptions*, such as "lesbian" or any other description that captures transgression. … every "you" is of the "system," logically speaking.[56]

This understanding of the map of power helps to clarify how the "unintelligibility" of subjectivities operates: they have no place on the map.

Solidary allies will therefore transgress against this map, against their assigned place in the system of power which organizes and distributes privilege, and through such transgression they will risk the coherence of their subjectivities and thereby come to see the ways in which their lives had been (invisibly) structured by power relations. The companionship of individuals who transgress against the map constitutes the kind of solidarity that Lugones and I seek to cultivate. Note that transgressing against the map is possible *both* for those occupying relatively privileged spots *and* for those whose spot is a place of domination and limitation. Lugones writes that we are "possible companions in resistance, where company goes against the grain of sameness as it goes against the grain of power. … Trespassing against the spatiality of oppressions is also a redrawing of the map, of the relationality of space."[57] The companionship of individuals in transgressing against the map of power constitutes the practice of ethical solidarity.

Coming to understand oneself as occupying a particular place on the map of power is a process of shifting one's self-horizon. It is the practice of de-centering oneself, of disturbing one's ease in one's own "world"(s), that starts to make visible the

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[56] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 8-9, emphasis mine.
[57] Ibid., 11.

map and the ways of re-drawing the map through transgression. Such de-centering of the self is a practice of epistemological humility, as I suggested in Chapter 1. As such, and in keeping with Ferguson's suggestions, solidary allies will attain the kind of shifts in knowledge required for ethical solidarity through "personal confrontations with those historically oppressed," as well as through the study of "the history of the relevant social relations as they shape one's own social context."[58] The question then remains how such epistemological shifts relate to transformations of character, with special reference to transformations of one's daily habits in support of human flourishing instead of in support of civilized oppression.

Becoming "Traitorous" to Privilege

One masterful analysis of the connection between the concerns of feminist epistemology and virtue ethics is Alison Bailey's article, "Locating Traitorous Identities: Toward a View of Privilege-Cognizant White Character."[59] In particular, Bailey connects many feminist epistemological concerns with the development of a resistant, virtuous character in the Aristotelian tradition. Following in her footsteps, I want to elaborate a practice of cultivating a "traitorous" character as intrinsic to the fruitful practice of ethical solidarity.

Bailey's aim in her essay is to re-describe Sandra Harding's analysis of "race traitors" who, "as a result of a shift in the way they understand the world, 'become marginal.'"[60] According to Harding, a "race traitor" is an anti-racist white person who

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[58] Ferguson, "Can I Choose Who I Am?," 117.
[59] Alison Bailey, "Locating Traitorous Identities: Toward a View of Privilege-Cognizant White Character.," *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 27-42.
[60] Ibid., 28.

learns from the experiences of marginalized groups and "outsiders-within," becoming aware of unearned privilege and actively opposing the system that distributes that privilege.[61] That is, race traitors utilize new knowledge gained by a shift in epistemic standpoint to actively oppose racial injustice.[62]

Bailey argues, convincingly I think, that Harding's language suggesting that race traitors "become marginal" is misleading because it tends to confuse a shift in epistemological standpoint with a shift in social location. That is, although those "who engage in traitorous challenges to segregation may undergo some shift in their subject position in the sense that they may be ostracized from certain communities, … they do not exchange their status as insiders for outsider-within status."[63] She identifies the confusion as a result of the "center/margin" metaphor and proposes an alternative, clarifying description of the same process.

Bailey recommends a distinction between people who animate what she calls "privilege-cognizant" versus "privilege-evasive" (white) "scripts". A "script," for Bailey, "includes a person's gestures, language, attitudes, concept of personal space, gut reactions to certain phenomena, and body awareness."[64] She understands the systemic distribution of privilege and social structures of domination as "a social-political system" that "comes with expected performances, attitudes, and behaviors, [i.e. – "scripts"] which reinforce and reinscribe unjust hierarchies. … The existence of sexism and racism as

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[61] See, for example, Minnie Bruce Pratt's work in Bulkin, *Yours in Struggle*.
[62] The terminology "race traitor" is a pejorative term used by white supremacists to describe whites who oppose racism. In the early 1990's, anti-racists adopted the term and remade it into a positive label. The anti-racist journal *Race Traitor*, founded in 1992, sports the tag-line, "Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity." Mab Segrest's 1994 book, *Memoir of a Race Traitor*, also uses the term in this way.
[63] Bailey, "Locating Traitorous Identities," 31.
[64] Ibid., 33.

systems requires everyone's daily collaboration."[65] (I would argue that this description equally applies to other forms of social oppression, like heterosexism.) Bailey interprets "collaboration" with oppressive systems as the "attitudes and behaviors expected of one's particular racial group;" expressions of these attitudes and behaviors constitute performances "that follow historically preestablished scripts." [66]

Bailey expresses a view that is consistent with my claim that privilege is a dynamic, rather than static or stable, characteristic: "Scripts differ with a subject's location within systems of domination."[67] Bailey interprets these scripts as "required" by the oppressive socio-political system for members of *all* racial groups. The different scripts corresponding to different racial identities are mutually reinforcing—black scripts reinforce (oppressive) messages about whiteliness, just as white scripts reinforce (oppressive) messages about blackness. Essentially, "What all racial scripts have in common is that in a white-centered culture, everyone is more or less expected to follow scripts that sustain white privilege."[68]

Bailey argues that "what holds racism in place" is that "whites have avoided the task of critically examining and giving up" their privilege.[69] There are clear advantages to such privilege, of course, and it is those advantages that the system relies on to ensure that people at the "center" do not reject (or even come to understand) their privileged position en masse. Whites who fail to recognize their privilege therefore animate what Bailey dubs "privilege-evasive" scripts. "Privilege-cognizant" resistance to oppressive

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[65] Ibid. Such collaboration includes, for example, the lack of public outcry over the following issues: pervasive violence against people of color, the disproportionately high percentage of black men in prison, pay inequities that correlate to gender and race, persistently narrow images of female beauty, and the replication of sexist and racist dynamics or stereotypes on television and in our entertainment media.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., 36.
[69] Ibid.

scripts means that traitorous individuals make "the choice to develop a critically reflective consciousness" and actively choose to violate the given script for their social locations.[70]

The rejection of privilege is not irrational, however; race traitors understand that their privilege comes at the expense of the unjust oppression of others. Race traitors affirm with Frederick Douglass that, "No man can put a chain about the ankle of his fellow man without at last finding the other end fastened about his own neck." With regard to any oppressive system—sexism, racism, heterosexism, or otherwise—the scripts that support that system inevitably constrain the possibilities for livable lives for *all* individuals within the system. This obstacle to livable lives for all serves as one basis for the shared values of ethical solidarity.

Where masculinity requires men to express only a narrow range of emotions, this constrains the possibility for men to experience and express the full spectrum of human feeling. Where racist systems prevent people from socializing with others outside their race, this prevents the possibility of meaningful friendships and sharing life experiences with others. Where heterosexism disallows the expression of romantic love between anyone other than one (cisgendered[71]) man and one (cisgendered) woman, this constrains the possibilities for loving relationships for all people and imposes artificial sources of tension in families that include gay, bisexual, or questioning individuals or those who have non-conforming gender expressions or sexual anatomy.

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[70] Ibid.

[71] "Cisgendered" is a term developed by transgender theorists to describe non-transgender persons, or persons who society considers to have a gender identity or performance that is appropriate to their biological or anatomical sex.

My argument is that Bailey's description of "race traitors" can be extrapolated to describe a category of individuals (solidary allies) who cultivate "traitorous identities" that resist the oppressive scripts mandated by *any* oppressive social system. That is, Bailey elaborates an ethical identity that is based on resistance to systemic social, cultural, and political oppression. It is my contention that the shift in epistemological standpoint of traitorous individuals is also transformational—or at minimum destabilizing—for their social locations. In other words, the transformation of knowledge and the rejection of oppressive scripts by those at the "center" of society create resistant reverberations in their immediate communities and beyond.

One example of this destabilization of social location emerges in Bailey's anecdote about the Bradens, a white couple, who in 1954 deeded their house (in a white neighborhood) to a black family, the Wades. Bailey uses this example to show that, although the Bradens were ostracized from the white community they live in because of their actions, they do not therefore "become marginal" in the sense of attaining "outsider-within" status. The privileges of whiteliness still attach to the Bradens, especially in contexts where their traitorous actions remain unknown. I argue, however, that there is an additional consequence of the Bradens' actions: they create epistemic reverberations in the immediate community.

What was previously an "unintelligible" thought (that transgresses against the social map of power) within the oppressive scripts of the racist socio-political system—that a white person would violate the unstated rule of neighborhood racial segregation—comes into being. Although the imagination of racist individuals may have been previously unable or unwilling to envision such an act, the performance of the traitorous

act by another inaugurates the possibility of cross-racial solidarity in the racist's consciousness and becomes an available (though perhaps unwanted) framework for the imagination. This disruption of the system of oppression and its required scripts destabilizes the comfortable enactment of privilege-evasive scripts. Even those whites who view the Bradens' actions as unconscionable experience a disturbance in their world-view since the prospect of such traitorous actions by white people was inconceivable before. On my view, traitorous actions, as intrinsic to ethical solidarity, are socially and politically effective precisely because of this destabilizing power.

Bailey remarks that "traitors destabilize their insider status by challenging and resisting the usual assumptions held by most white people (such as the belief that white privilege is earned, inevitable, or natural). … Decentering the center makes it clear that traitors and outsiders within have a common political interest in challenging white privilege, but that they do so from different social locations."[72] I interpret Bailey's claim about the common political interest of traitorous individuals and outsiders within as evidence that ethical solidarity is possible—and highly desirable—across differences in identity or experience.[73] Further, I argue that this common interest is not only political, but ethical as well.

I do not understand social identities as fixed or homogenous.[74] I see ethical solidarity as practiced from within different social locations, where it promotes simultaneous and synergetic individual and collective transformation. On the individual or personal level, transformation that is informed and inspired by ethical solidarity

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[72] Ibid., 32-33.
[73] For an extended discussion of the relationship between the privileged and the oppressed with regard to solidarity, see Harvey, "Moral Solidarity and Empathetic Understanding.".
[74] I particularly find useful María Lugones' notion of the "thickness" of individuals in relationship to their identity groups, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 3.

includes the conscientious disruption of unproblematic or straightforward claims to knowledge. Bailey claims that "a key feature of privilege-cognizant standpoints is the choice to develop a critically reflective consciousness. … Traitors *choose* to try to understand the price at which privileges are gained."[75] The cultivation of a traitorous identity as characterized by Bailey is intrinsic to the practice of ethical solidarity.

Bailey continues, "An occasional traitorous act does not a traitor make. Truly animating a privilege-cognizant white script requires that traitors cultivate a character from which traitorous practices will flow."[76] According to Bailey, cultivating one's character in this way closely resembles the method that Aristotle proposes for cultivating virtue. In other words, if one practices conscientiously developing habits that promote virtue, one thereby gradually transforms one's character such that one begins to perform virtue organically, *out of habit*, rather than through sustained, conscientious effort. Similarly, ethical solidarity is a *sustained* practice that informs one's life choices, everyday actions, and worldview. An occasional act of solidarity does not a solidary ally make. The cultivation of ethical solidarity in one's character requires the kind of habituation and long-term moral practice that Aristotle argues are necessary to virtue.

Bailey writes, "To be a race traitor is to have a particular kind of character that predisposes a person to animate privilege-cognizant scripts. The shift from privilege-evasive to privilege-cognizant white scripts, then, can be understood as a shift in character. It is this change in character that causes whites to move "off-center," to reposition themselves with regard to privilege."[77] In other words, a shift in one's settled knowledge has the capacity to inaugurate a transformation of character. When a person

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[75] Bailey, "Locating Traitorous Identities," 36.
[76] Ibid., 38.
[77] Ibid.

recognizes the dehumanization of marginalized people caused by normative social structures of power and privilege, that person (as committed to treating all human beings *as human* in social practice) becomes predisposed to act in solidarity with those who are being dehumanized or oppressed.

The animation of privilege-cognizant scripts and the transformational de-centering of the self through shifts in one's epistemic standpoint are mutually reinforcing practices of ethical solidarity. That is, the more clearly one comes to understand the operations of privilege and power in society, the more effectively one is able to act in resistance—and reciprocally, the more one practices resistance in a variety of contexts, the better one comes to understand the operations of privilege and power.[78] Bailey argues that "becoming traitorous is a process similar to the acquisition of moral virtue" in the Aristotelian tradition.[79] "Achieving a traitorous standpoint, like cultivating virtue, is a process."[80] I strongly agree. I will employ an Aristotelian understanding of the reformation of character towards virtue as analogous to the reformation of character towards ethical solidarity.

My definition of ethical solidarity as a *network* of practices on the basis of shared values is intended to acknowledge the fact that there is no comprehensive process that will consistently produce effective solidary allies. By employing an Aristotelian framework, Bailey recognizes this same point: "Just as there is no recipe for attaining a virtuous character, there is no one formula for becoming a race traitor. It is a mistake to

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[78] To use an example that is not related to moral action, this mutually-reinforcing process works in just the way that one improves at playing chess. The more that one learns about possible chess strategies (e.g. – by being told by another player or by reading a strategy book), the better one becomes at playing the game. Reciprocally, the better one becomes at playing chess, the more one discovers (through the process of playing) possible strategies.
[79] Bailey, "Locating Traitorous Identities," 38.
[80] Ibid., 38.

think that becoming traitorous is tantamount to completely overcoming racism."[81] Bailey describes a "traitorous practical wisdom" that enables the traitor to determine when, where, and how to animate privilege-cognizant scripts to their greatest effect. On my view, this traitorous practical wisdom is an exercise of resistance against oppressive structures of power and privilege. Further, as I understand ethical solidarity as the means by which we treat others *as human*, I therefore understand active resistance against dehumanizing structures and actions *as virtue*. Cultivating ethical solidarity is not only *analogous* to cultivating virtue; it is also *virtuous itself*. Ethical solidarity participates in the unity of the virtues, and has particular resonance (as mentioned above) with practical wisdom and courage.

As Bailey implies by saying that one is mistaken if one thinks that becoming traitorous equals overcoming racism, we must accept that our practical wisdom will never be so fully developed that we will not make mistakes. (The point is, after all, that we are only *human*.) On my view, the mutually reinforcing relationship of epistemic de-centering and traitorous action is a practice—in the sense of the word that implies improvement over time—that helps to develop one's traitorous practical wisdom. One develops a nest of habits and conscious choices that predispose one to act in solidarity with oppressed others. Ethical solidarity is a practice both in the sense of *praxis*—or action stemming from an understanding of theory[82]—and in the colloquial sense of intentional, motivated repetition—the honing of a skill. Aristotle says "we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave

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[81] Ibid., 39.
[82] Connoting the "indissoluble link between theory and practice." See Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 37.

actions;"[83] we become solidary allies by doing traitorous actions—acts of ethical solidarity.

As Bailey notes, it is a mistake to presume that the effective practice of ethical solidarity requires or entails the complete overcoming of privilege or prejudice in ourselves and others. In keeping with Aristotle's theory of the virtues, however, such a standard of perfection is not necessary. Though we may experience feelings or desires in ourselves that we know are not virtuous, we are nevertheless able to control those impulses enough not to act on them, and in time such thoughts and feelings may dissipate. (Aristotle would describe this as "continence" rather than "temperance.")

In the context of ethical solidarity, though we may recognize feelings, reactions, or thoughts in ourselves that support oppressive systems of power (e.g. those which are racist or homophobic), we can acknowledge the fact, understand that such thoughts or feelings are unjust, and refrain from acting upon them. We may even find ways to use such impulses as epistemic clues—identifying such moments can serve as opportunities for teaching and re-training ourselves. Because we have all been shaped as persons in the context of the society around us—even and especially when that society supports oppressive social scripts—it is to be expected that we will have absorbed privileged and/or prejudiced beliefs and attitudes despite our conscious and principled rejection of them.[84]

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[83] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 19.

[84] This is even true of oppressed people who absorb negative messages about themselves and develop "internalized oppression". For more on this point, see Bell Hooks, *Salvation: Black People and Love*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: William Morrow, 2001). Butler is also deeply concerned with the social construction of selves; I discuss her theory of the construction of subjects in more detail in Chapter 3.

Cultivating a "Traitorous" Character through "World"-Traveling

As Bailey argues, the practice of "world"-traveling helps us to cultivate a traitorous identity. I would argue that such a traitorous identity is able to inhabit multiple "worlds" and to make the epistemic shifts from one "world" to another. As Lugones makes clear, however, acting as a traitorous solidary ally is not "acting" in the sense of pretense or becoming different from what one "normally" is. The self that one inhabits in another "world" is, crucially, an aspect or instantiation of one's genuine self. One develops a traitorous identity through the practice of de-centering oneself epistemically by traveling to other "worlds." Traveling to another "world" is essentially *leaving behind* the "world" or "worlds" that one is comfortable in. This traveling may occur through actual, physical travel, to a place where one is not comfortably at home.[85] It may also occur in other ways, by exposing oneself to narratives (e.g. - in books or movies), people, social situations, languages, or even works of art that presuppose and represent a "world" different from one's own home "world." We make the *intentional choice* to "world"-travel in these ways because of our traitorous identities. As Bailey claims, being traitorous means making the choice to develop a critically reflective consciousness; "world"-traveling is a particularly effective way of developing such a consciousness.

Crucially, however, my existence in a "world" does not depend upon my understanding or traveling to that "world." In fact, it is this possibility of an understanding of myself that *escapes* me, and which is dependent upon the perceptions of others, that is most relevant to the center/margin dynamics described by Harding and Bailey. The possibility of my being perceived or named in a way that I do not understand

[85] This might be traveling to a foreign country, or even just traveling to a physical space that does not belong to one's own "world". A heterosexual person attending a Pride parade would be an example of "world"-traveling in this sense.

myself—particularly when that perception dehumanizes me or shows me to be dehumanizing others—*constitutes* the very risk posed by a shift in epistemic standpoint:

> In a "world," some of the inhabitants may not understand or hold the particular construction of them that constructs them in that "world." So, there may be "worlds" that construct me in ways that I do not even understand. Or, it may be that I understand the construction, but do not hold it of myself. I may not accept it as an account of myself, a construction of myself. And yet, I may be *animating* such a construction.[86]

Lugones' understanding of what it means to *animate* a self (or a script) is more nuanced than what Bailey is able to capture. For Lugones, even though in one "world" I might be animating a privilege-cognizant script, I may be seen from/in another "world"—*while performing the very same actions*—as animating a privilege-evasive script. That is, what from one "world" is seen as resistance may be seen in another "world" as conforming to oppressive or normative scripts.

The importance of understanding "world"-traveling and the epistemic landscape it entails is therefore critical both for Lugones and for my own understanding of the practice of ethical solidarity. According to Lugones, "If you see oppression, you tend not to see resistance. … So, there is an epistemic tendency, unless one has cultivated a resistant multiple interpretive vein, to see behavior as either resistant or oppressed."[87] The cultivation of a "resistant multiple interpretive vein" is the necessary foundation for the practice of ethical solidarity, and this cultivation occurs through the practice of "world"-traveling.

When one "world"-travels, one experiences the de-centering of one's own "world"—of one's entire familiar worldview and epistemic presuppositions—and this de-

[86] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 88.
[87] Ibid., 13.

centering enables one to begin to develop alternative ways of viewing the world. One begins to learn to see one's own "world" from the perspective of a different "world"—preferably, from the perspective of *many* different "worlds" (hence a "*multiple* interpretive vein"). The reason that solidary allies participate in the at times uncomfortable practice of "world"-traveling is that they are motivated by the life-orienting value of treating others *as human*—the value of ethical solidarity. Travel to other "worlds" enables one to expand one's notion of the human in ways that were previously unavailable when one was limited to one's own "world".

Embroiled in the process of cultivating a "resistant multiple interpretive vein"—fundamental to a traitorous identity—is the consequence that one must abandon the quest for a linear, fixed, and coherent narrative of self.[88] Such coherence is generally reserved for those selves that do not "world"-travel: those that live comfortably at the "center" of society and who are at ease in their own "world." According to Lugones, the experience of oneself as different or even contradictory in different "worlds" is natural, to be expected, and does not imply the necessity of synthesizing these different selves into one coherent, non-contradictory narrative. The cultivation of ethical solidarity is therefore intimately linked to the formation—or *transformation*—of selves.

At this point we return full-circle to the issue of the invisibility of privilege and its relation to the failure to "world"-travel. Bailey writes, "The failure of whites to see race privilege is, in part, a function of a failure to world travel. In the United States, people of color world travel out of necessity, but white privilege ensures that most whites need to

[88] Lugones and Haraway both share this view. Though I draw upon theories of virtue ethics, my point here about the cultivation of traitorous identities is in stark contrast to virtue theory as interpreted by, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, Third Edition*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

world travel only voluntarily. … When I restrict my movement to worlds in which I am comfortable, privilege is difficult to see."[89] Due to the tendency for privilege to remain invisible when we are at ease in our own "world," solidary allies who are committed to the value of ethical solidarity must *actively* seek to "world"-travel.[90] "World"-traveling is prerequisite for gaining the epistemic standpoint necessary to produce one's own analysis of the workings of privilege and oppression. One can then use that analysis to practice ethical solidarity through animating resistant or privilege-cognizant scripts. Furthermore, once solidary allies come to fully appreciate the harms of only seeing marginalized others from the perspective of one "world", the compulsion to "world"-travel becomes an *ethical* necessity.

Given the amorphous description of what constitutes a "world," how will we know if we are "at ease" there—and therefore in need of "world"-traveling? Lugones describes four ways in which one may be at ease in a world.[91] First, I am at ease if I am a fluent speaker in that "world"—"I know all the norms that there are to be followed. I know all the words that there are to be spoken. I know all the moves. I am confident."[92] Second, I may be at ease in a "world" if I do not feel at all constrained by its dominant norms. I am what Lugones calls "normatively happy." Third, I am at ease by being humanly bonded in a "world", by loving others and being loved by them. "It should be noticed that I may be with those I love and be at ease because of them in a 'world' that is

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[89] Bailey, "Locating Traitorous Identities," 39-40.
[90] For example, if I go to an LGBTQ party and see there the loving displays of affection between partners in that "world", as a straight person I may never until that moment have realized the extent to which such loving displays between same-sex couples are missing from the heteronormative "world" I am used to. I then realize that in my "world", this is a heterosexual privilege which had formerly been invisible to me, and I am now motivated to expose and resist that privilege in my "world".
[91] See Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 90.
[92] Ibid.

otherwise as hostile to me as 'worlds' get."[93] (The possibility for this kind of ease in a "world" particularly invites loving relationships between solidary allies and those who are oppressed.) Finally, I may be at ease because I have a shared history with others in that "world;" I am able to converse easily with others of that "world" about our shared social and cultural history.

Lugones argues that the "maximal" way of being at ease in a "world" is to be at ease in all four ways—a state which is "somewhat dangerous because it tends to produce people who have no inclination to travel across 'worlds' or no experience of 'world'-traveling."[94] For the purposes of my argument, the potential for people to grow up maximally at ease in a "world" indicates the importance of not only transforming our selves via "world"-traveling, but of *changing "worlds" themselves* and the people who live in them in such a way that it becomes impossible to remain oblivious of other "worlds" and the lives of the people who inhabit them.

Ethical solidarity involves leaving one's own familiar "world." "World"-travel of this sort requires a displacement of self that reevaluates the subjective experience of "flourishing". Where Nussbaum is concerned about leaving sufficient space for private flourishing, one must also ask what social circumstances in relation to power condition the subjective experience or evaluation of one's own flourishing. One must come to the realization that one's knowledge and perspective are fundamentally informed by the structures of power that govern social life, and transformations of consciousness and self will be required if one is ever to conform one's own daily (habitual) existence to the life-orienting values one holds internally.

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[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.

In the next chapter, I explore the ways in which individual transformations of consciousness have the potential to shift social and political "worlds"—particularly those constructed on the basis of widespread, dominating norms—in such a way as to support human flourishing for all. These shifts, given the account of transformations of character I have described here, will *not* be possible on the basis of an approach to diversity that takes "tolerance" as of central importance. I will also address potential objections to the notion that solidarity *as human beings* is possible, since this position has been rejected either categorically or, at least, as an issue of semantics, by Richard Rorty, Sally Scholz, and others.

CHAPTER 3

SOLIDARITY AS SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

To find that one is fundamentally unintelligible (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find one to be an impossibility) is to find that one has not yet achieved access to the human.

Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*

In her 1994 paper, "From Identity Politics to Social Feminism: A Plea for the Nineties," Seyla Benhabib claims that we "desperately need a new politics of civility and solidarity" and that "[in] this task some of the supposedly discredited and old-fashioned ideas of ethical and utopian feminism have a great role to play."[1] Fifteen years later, though there has been extensive discussion of solidarity within feminist theory, we are still lacking and in need of a positive, collaborative project describing an ethical and utopian theory of solidarity. Judith Butler's recent work, as a touchstone for trends in feminist postmodern theory, indicates a somewhat reluctant and tentative turn to ethics.[2] On my view, Butler remains entangled with theoretical and psychoanalytic questions about subject-formation that never quite make contact with concrete suggestions for effecting change. Other feminist theoretical work has rejected or ignored Benhabib's plea in favor of pursuing projects aimed at, for example, "freedom" rather than solidarity.[3] And, as I have argued, even contemporary feminist work that directly

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[1] Seyla Benhabib, "From Identity Politics to Social Feminism: A Plea for the Nineties," *Philosophy of Education 1994*, http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/eps/PES-Yearbook/94_docs/BENHABIB.HTM.
[2] Judith Butler, "Ethical Ambivalence," in *The Turn to Ethics*, ed. Marjorie B. Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 15-28 Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New: Fordham University Press, 2005).
[3] See Linda M. G. Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 2005).

addresses itself to issues of human flourishing shows a tendency to keep the question of our ethical duties at a distance.[4]

In this chapter, I expand upon Butler's ethical reflections by connecting them with María Lugones' theory of "world"-traveling. I show how theoretical considerations of the "intelligibility" of subjects may be understood concretely to impact the potential for human flourishing and describe the ways in which solidary action can make positive interventions in schemes of intelligibility. This chapter begins with a consideration of the role and potential harms and benefits of normativity. I then take up Lugones' concept of "worlds" and "world"-traveling in elaborating the role of solidarity in supporting livable, intelligible, flourishing lives for diverse others. My analysis of "world"-traveling leads me to a consideration of the benefits and dangers of notions of "home" and self-interest, which I then take up in critique of identity politics as a model for social change. In particular, I distinguish my notion of ethical solidarity from the idea of coalition, which focuses on the role of self-interest. Finally, I conclude by arguing that solidarity is a more appropriate and effective model for promoting diverse human flourishing than either "tolerance" or "freedom."

Solidarity and Normativity

As I discussed in Chapter 1, there are two meanings and operations of "normativity" according to Butler. First, normativity refers to the common presuppositions that orient a community or a "world" (in Lugones' sense of the word) and give meaning to our actions.[5] In this sense, it is impossible for us to negotiate the

[4] See my discussion of Martha Nussbaum in Chapter 1.
[5] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 206.

world without normativity. Normativity is what gives ethical claims their clout, language its sense, structure to the world. Butler writes, "One the one hand, norms seem to signal the regulatory or normalizing function of power, but from another perspective, norms are precisely what binds individuals together, forming the basis of their ethical and political claims."[6] Without some kind of normativity in social interactions, we would not be intelligible at all. This is partly Butler's claim and concern, that normative structures condition the emergence of our subjectivities and yet such normativity can operate in a way that is harmful. For Butler, the central paradox of ethical subjectivity is how one can justify the critique of normativity when it is precisely that which allows one to emerge as a subject.

I am less concerned with that puzzle, mostly because I see it as an intellectual inquiry into the origin of something (the critique of normativity) that has already been shown to *be possible*. My interest lies in the problem of how norms can be shifted or altered *now that we have emerged* as subjects and understand the harms that certain norms wreak upon us. This is not to say that subject formation is irrelevant for social change, but rather to shift focus to the concrete possibilities for changing the conditions of the emergence of subjectivity. I also think that the problem of the critique of norms which condition the emergence of our subjectivity is best elaborated from a perspective that takes into account the multiplicity of social "worlds" as they are initially described by Lugones. Butler's psychoanalytic approach has not yet shown itself as engaging with the issue of multiple social "worlds." Lugones' perspective on the way that subjectivity is altered across "worlds" is a crucial insight for understanding how norms inflect subjectivity.

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[6] Ibid., 219.

The second kind of normativity that Butler identifies is one that operates in a way that is harmful to a variety of livable lives. This harmful normativity strips and outstrips personal agencies because insofar as harmful norms structure the available options for livable lives, those options are created as a function of systems of meanings that are outside of the control of individual subjects. The difficulty with norms in this second sense is that they cause certain people to be marginalized to the point of being unrecognizable as human persons, or "unintelligible" with relation to the norms that structure the social "world." This unintelligibility often operates such that there is no description for one's identity or form of life in the vocabulary and imagination of the social "world." The failure to be intelligible with reference to certain kinds of pre-given identity markers often results in violence. For example, transgender individuals—whose gender expression does not fit within the norms of certain social "worlds"—are vulnerable to extreme violence when their bodies are perceived as violating gender norms.

As a variety of social norms have historically and predominantly been deployed in the past, normativity has been a significant force of harm against many people. Specific forms of normativity keyed to relations of privilege and identity have formed the nearly invisible backdrop behind a variety of social oppressions—racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ableism, etc. As I discussed in Chapter 2, "civilized oppression" (the habitual and often unconscious behaviors of privileged individuals in sustaining unjust power relations) works primarily on the basis of structuring social relations—and in particular central social norms—in such a way that they systemically privilege certain individuals and identity groups above others. The aspect of normativity that makes it harmful

primarily revolves around the overly narrow scope of certain social norms. These social norms are defined in a way that includes only a portion of human beings while excluding others.

Hence you have, for example, constructions of what is essential to human beings in civil society as that they are "free, equal, and independent"—but this characterization of humanity is overly narrow because a) it excludes people who are not understood as "free, equal, and independent" according to narrow norms that disallow certain groups from the possibility of being described under those meanings and b) it assigns a fundamental normative importance to those three human characteristics alone when they do not in fact designate the fully inclusive category of adult human persons.[7]

Normativity in this narrow sense has harmed all those people whose lives, experiences, or embodiment do not fall within the narrow norm of the forms of life supported by society. And, in another way, such norms may be understood to harm even the privileged in their social imagination and constructions of identity. These exclusions have resulted in various social and political hegemonies, including hegemonies of heterosexuality, of white supremacy, of patriarchy, etc. One might reasonably raise the concern at this point that it becomes difficult to discern which sorts of normative exclusions are acceptable and which are harmful. That is, on what basis could one argue that the normativity of, for example, religions that reject homosexuality as a "sin" is to be rejected while the normativity of individuals' control over their own reproductive capacities is to be valued? This is a difficult yet fundamental question and one which I attempt to answer in the fourth and final chapter of this dissertation. For now, then, I

[7] See my discussion of Nussbaum on this point in Chapter 1.

defer the question of the details of how one negotiates which norms, in particular, count as supporting a variety of livable and flourishing human lives.

Instead, the point which I wish to emphasize here is that the harms imposed by narrow normativity are the result of insufficient empathy, imagination, knowledge, and solidary action on the part of those individuals and groups who *do* fit the narrow norm. The harms of such normativity are also *ethical* harms insofar as they violate human dignity. Therefore those people who sustain harmful norms through their comfort with them or ignorance of their harms are *morally culpable* for the harms inflicted on those who do not fit the norm. Despite my claim that normativity outstrips personal agencies, this ethical responsibility impinges upon privileged individuals for the many reasons elaborated in Chapter 2.[8] In particular, "civilized oppression" is sustained *as a system* on the basis of the habitual actions of *individuals*. We must inquire into the means by which these very individuals are capable—at least as a collective if not one-by-one—of intervening into systems of oppression. Without such an inquiry, we risk falling victim to the claim that these systems always and inevitably outstrip and overpower the agency of individuals, resulting in a kind of ethical and political quietism.[9] My task now is to show how the transformations of consciousness of solidary allies described in the previous chapter link up with concrete actions in the social world in support of human flourishing and livable lives for diverse others.

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[8] See Chapter 2, pp. 54-58.
[9] Martha Nussbaum made just such a charge of quietism against Judith Butler in Martha C. Nussbaum, "The professor of parody," *The New Republic* 220, no. 8 (February 22, 1999): 37.

Un/Intelligibility Relative to Social "Worlds"

As I suggested in Chapter 2, the transformations of consciousness and values that take place as a result of ethical solidarity may *motivate* solidary allies to make concrete changes in society in support of human flourishing, and/or such transformations may come about as the *result* of a concrete social experience that reveals the injustice of prevailing structures of power. I devoted the bulk of Chapter 2 to explicating the personal transformations of consciousness that are intrinsic to ethical solidarity. In what follows here, I intend to take up the complementary task of elucidating the *social* transformations intrinsic to ethical solidarity and how one can leverage these changes—in other words, those transformations of society that are most supportive of human flourishing. In particular, I want to return to a consideration of the benefits that attach to a view of "the human" that incorporates insights from both Nussbaum's treatment of human flourishing as well as Butler's treatment of livable lives.

As I argued in Chapter 2, the *risking of the self* is a crucial practice for solidary allies—particularly those who are systemically privileged by prevailing social structures of power. Motivation for risking the self arises out of grasping the ways in which human lives are deformed and devalued by the harmful normativity of certain social "worlds." I turn now to an articulation of what this risking of the self might look like in concrete social practice and the ways in which social "worlds" may be transformed through such solidary acts. Such an elucidation is a difficult task because what one understands as "intelligible" is a consequence of one's social standpoint within a "world" and is therefore constrained epistemologically by one's self- and social horizon. Therefore my very articulation here of what sorts of risks may be available will be constrained by my

own social standpoint and my experience in traveling across a limited number and variety of "worlds."

As María Lugones describes social "worlds," it is possible to be very much at ease in one's own "world." If I know all the social norms there are to be followed in a "world"—particularly those norms that I know without even *realizing* that I know them—and if I do not feel constrained by these norms, then my subjectivity is intelligible with reference to the social grid that constructs that "world." As I "world"-travel, I begin to *experience* the un/intelligibility of my subjectivity as it conforms to or dissolves against the social grid that constructs other "worlds" than my own. The very reason that the question of my un/intelligibility as a subject arises is because the very easy "fit" between my own subjectivity and the social grid of my "world" is disturbed, and that disturbance expands my self-horizon by bringing into view parts of my self that were formerly invisible in another "world." The making-visible of formerly invisible aspects of the self through "world"-traveling is a particularly useful practice for solidary allies who are systemically privileged.

To take a trivial example, suppose I do not usually experience myself as right-handed. That is, suppose I do not move through my "world" with an awareness that my "world" is constructed on the basis of norms that presume almost all people are right-handed like myself. I do not feel constrained by the norm of right-handedness because I fit the norm, and my right-handedness is "intelligible" because my "world" easily accommodates it. If, on the other hand, I find myself in a social "world" that takes left-handedness as the norm, I will suddenly be confronted very clearly by my right-handedness because I no longer fit the social norm. The desk where I sit is not made for

me to write easily, people reach to shake my left hand, everyone habitually climbs or descends stairs with the handrail on their left.

I am often uncomfortable and feel off-balance in this "world," because it is awkward for me to use my left hand for things I am accustomed to doing with my right. Furthermore, I am frustrated because I experience myself in this "world" as clumsy and maladroit, although I know that I am coordinated and even graceful in a right-handed "world." My right-handedness becomes an aspect of my subjectivity that is in tension with the norms of the left-handed "world," and if I am unable or unwilling to leave this "world," I must either deal with the discomfort of that mismatch or learn to adapt. Even if I decide to adapt and I become relatively proficient at left-handedness, perhaps I still feel as though I would be *more* comfortable, or more myself, if I were able to exist with ease as a right-handed person at least occasionally.

There are a series of insights and inferences needed for solidary allies in the above situation. Because I am self-interested, the first insight might be that accommodations ought to be made to support the lives of right-handed people in the "world" that takes left-handedness as the norm. This view does not display any particular characteristics of solidarity, however, using instead a self-interested framework of identity politics. (Right-handed people should unite to demand social changes on the basis of their disadvantage as members of an identity group.)

My first insight as a *solidary ally* would be to infer from that initial experience that changes are also needed in the right-handed "world" to accommodate left-handed people, although I am not myself left-handed. As a solidary ally, I would take concrete actions in my right-handed "world" to advocate, as a right-handed person, for changes

that would benefit left-handed people. Finally, however, the practice of ethical solidarity would support the additional realization that there are aspects of both the right- and left-handed "worlds" that fail to support the lives of human beings who are, for example, disabled and for whom "handedness" is an incongruous way of understanding their subjectivity.

For such human beings, social "worlds" that operate on the basis of norms that presume handedness construct them not only as people who are uncomfortable or clumsy, as in the situation of a right-handed person in a left-handed "world," but furthermore as *unintelligible*. The menu of available options for understanding one's subjectivity is limited to right-handed, left-handed, or ambidextrous. It is always already presumed—on a level that does not usually rise to consciousness in the vast majority of people who live in these social "worlds"—that every human person exists in such a way that "handedness" is a part of their being.

The point to be made here is that, because social "worlds" are constructed on the basis of shared meanings, there is always something fundamentally malleable about the norms that govern any given "world." If a critical mass of people join together in solidarity against narrow social norms that are harmful or undermining of human flourishing, a point arrives at which the norms themselves are disturbed rather than just the subjectivity of those who do not fit the norms. One might ask at this point how the individual practice of ethical solidarity could support the human flourishing of others, if the real impact on human flourishing arrives at the level of "world"-changing via collective action.

To return to the above example, an individual could have a significant impact on the human flourishing of disabled people who do not have "handedness" as part of their being by, for instance, inventing technologies to assist those people in navigating the "handed" world. (Those individuals who created the software that allows people to "type" on a computer by transcribing their spoken words made a material contribution to the human flourishing of the people who use the software.) On another level, individuals may protect others' flourishing through direct intervention in situations where another person is especially vulnerable to harm.

With reference to the left-handed "world," it would be one thing for norms of climbing the stairs to change such that people become comfortable navigating both sides, or for stairs to be constructed in a new way that supports both left- and right-handed people. However, at the individual level, one person can protect another by, for example, reaching out to catch a person who has lost her balance on a busy stairwell. Without the material support of another single individual, the person could fall and be gravely injured.

The above example may come off as trivial until one considers the harms to human flourishing that have resulted from the inaction of individual people, taken collectively. Recall the murder of Kitty Genovese in 1964, in which no fewer than 38 of her neighbors heard or saw her being attacked three times over the course of approximately half an hour. Not one of these individuals came to her assistance or called the police until after she was already dead. If even one of Kitty's neighbors had acted by picking up the phone to alert the police—not even risking their own safety, as they were secure in their homes—she would likely have lived through the attack. The solidary action of individuals is, therefore, of critical importance in ensuring human flourishing,

particularly in "worlds" that operate with harmful hegemonic norms. If we lived in a "world" where systemically enabled violence against women was not an ever-present possibility, Kitty Genovese might never have been attacked in the first place.

Transforming the Social through Multiple and Malleable "Worlds"

Extrapolating from the example of un/intelligibility and the experience of one's own and others' subjectivity across different "worlds," one can begin to see the ways in which individuals might experience themselves and others as radically different in different "worlds." If I understand how being a right-handed person in a left-handed "world" could construct me as clumsy—in my own eyes as well as in the eyes of others—despite my sense that I am coordinated and graceful in a different "world," it perhaps becomes easier to understand how Lugones can claim to experience herself as "playful" in one world but "unplayful" in another.[10] That is, in one "world," Lugones feels herself light-hearted and lively, whereas in another she feels serious and staid. It seems that the phenomenon of different experiences in different "worlds" may combine the moral and the aesthetic simultaneously, insofar as aesthetic judgments may sometimes have an ethical impact. So, for example, in a "world" in which black people do not fit the norm of "beauty," this has both an aesthetic as well as an ethical impact.

Because what is "intelligible" in a given "world" is a function of *created* social systems of meaning, these systems and the meanings they make available are open to transformation and therefore to new forms of intelligibility. The mechanism by which

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[10] See Maria Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 92.

one could develop the conditions for a livable life or the conditions with reference to which one could *become intelligible* in a "world" is precisely the ability of people inhabiting that "world" to change it. Collective efforts to change social "worlds" are not usually easy, but they are possible. For example, grassroots efforts to change narrow and racist social norms of beauty mobilized the phrase "black is beautiful" and established social institutions to specifically celebrate black beauty.

Changes to the norms and systems of meaning constructing a "world" may create new possibilities for a variety of intelligible, livable, and flourishing lives. Different sorts of changes may, on the other hand, constrain or obstruct those same possibilities. Lugones herself acknowledges the malleability of social "worlds" while highlighting the impact a "world" can have on the identity or intelligibility of individuals: "To the extent that the attribute [unplayfulness] is an important ingredient of the self that she is in that 'world' … *that 'world' would have to be changed if she is to be playful in it*. It is not the case that if she could come to be at ease in it, she would be her own playful self."[11]

Thus, the conditions that determine whether a person possesses a particular characteristic in a given "world" are dependent upon the norms and systems of meanings of that "world," *not* on whether or not the person is *at ease* in the "world." Ethical solidarity is a powerful force insofar as many solidary allies acting together—whether aware of the unity of their actions or not—are capable of transforming social "worlds" to better support a variety of livable, flourishing human lives. The transformations wrought

[11] Ibid.

by solidary allies would help to make certain meanings both available and livable, such as "lesbian" in a formerly heteronormative "world."[12]

One crucial role of solidary allies is in transforming "worlds" to support a greater diversity of intelligible human lives. In this moment, the issue of "intelligibility" and the question of "who counts as human" converge. As Butler says, "If we take the field of the human for granted, then we fail to think critically—and ethically—about the consequential ways that the human is being produced, reproduced, deproduced."[13] If we are to think critically about the production of the human in social life, then we must think about the ways that we can, as solidary allies, transform the norms of who counts as human in our "worlds" so that they support a variety of livable human lives.

Naomi Scheman's essay, "Queering the Center by Centering the Queer: Reflections on Transsexuals and Secular Jews,"[14] offers help in thinking about the ways that solidary allies must risk the intelligibility of their selves in solidarity with those who are already unintelligible within the social horizon of a given "world." Scheman proposes to investigate the question of what makes for an intelligible and admirable life by explicitly centering "the normatively unintelligible" because "[r]elocating the gaze to a place of normative incoherence can help to destabilize the center, upsetting the claims of those who reside there to that combination of naturalness and virtue that characterizes normativity."[15] Scheman's actions themselves, by centering that which is unintelligible in her "world" (like the gender identity of transsexuals), are the actions of a solidary ally.

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[12] See Chapter 2, p. 75 for Lugones' use of "lesbian" as an example of an identity which is unintelligible in certain social "worlds."
[13] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 222.
[14] Naomi Scheman, "Queering the Center by Centering the Queer: Reflections on Transsexuals and Secular Jews," in *Feminists Rethink the Self* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 124-162.
[15] Ibid., 132.

As someone who was normatively at ease with the construction of gender identity in her world, Scheman was initially confused by centering transsexual gender identity *because it was unintelligible* in her "world" and because she had not yet fully disengaged from the norms constructing her as "at ease" in that world. The confusion Scheman experienced in the course of de-centering herself and centering non-normative gender identity was a risking of the self. "Even with the motivation of solidarity, I still just did not understand. But that motivation … did lead me to what it ought not have taken me so long to see: I was keeping to myself the position of unproblematized, paradigmatic subject, puzzling over how to understand some especially recalcitrant object."[16] Scheman proposes that centering the unintelligible—decentering oneself and centering instead other subjects whose humanity is elided by the norms of one's own "world"—is an important act of solidarity that, when properly enacted, causes an internal destabilization of self-consciousness that is precisely the sort of risking of the self I have argued is called for by solidary allies. Ethical solidarity is thus a practice that displaces and demotes harmful norms.

Because, as I have argued, privileged subjects are often those whose participation would make the most substantial difference in altering social conditions for the better, solidary allies have the ethical duty to practice risking themselves in support of the human flourishing of others. As Scheman says, "[I]t ought to fall to those of us who occupy positions of relative safety and privilege to complicate our own locations, to explore the costs of our comfort, and to help imagine a world in which it would be safe to be non-, ambiguously, or multiply gendered."[17] As I stated in Chapter 2, the

[16] Ibid., 134.
[17] Ibid., 133.

interventions that happen as a result of risking the self cannot be fully determined or controlled in advance. There is, as Scheman discovered, a significance in undergoing the process of disorientation that happens when one de-centers oneself from privilege. The new forms of life that come into view when we take such risks are possible, nevertheless, through a consideration of what is missed or occluded by the norms of a given "world," aided by the operation of courage and a kind of imaginative wisdom. As Butler says, "one looks for the conditions by which the object field is constituted as well as the limits of those conditions, *the moment where they point up their contingency and their transformability*."[18]

As Scheman's work and experience show, ethical solidarity transforms self-interest so that its treachery is only treachery against current forms of community that restrict "the human." The communal treachery of solidary allies is enacted against harmful norms that undermine the human flourishing of others. Lisa Tessman has engaged in a sustained consideration of the virtue of "loyalty" (versus treachery) for oppressed individuals and communities. Regarding the loyalty of individuals to oppressed identities or communities, she argues that "group loyalty can be a virtue only when it is exercised highly critically and when the object of loyalty is not the sort of group that would best be deconstructed rather than transformed."[19] The question of deconstruction versus transformation of groups engages with issues of what sorts of "worlds" need transformation versus destruction. It seems likely that some "worlds" are constructed on the basis of norms so harmful that they ought to be dismantled altogether rather than merely re-shaped. Solidary allies participate in treacherous acts against forms

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[18] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 216, emphasis mine.
[19] Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, USA, 2005), 156.

of community and identity that constrain the possibilities for human flourishing—they are loyal to a notion of "the human" that incorporates diverse forms of life.[20] Therefore, in order to discern which loyalties will be virtuous for solidary allies, as Tessman suggests, additional virtues—such as a traitorous practical wisdom—will be required.

Ethical solidarity is a special virtue which can best be understood as requiring other virtues—particularly the virtues of epistemological humility, courage, imaginative wisdom and improvisation, empathy, and forgiveness. Epistemological humility is required to comprehend new and significant facts about the lives and experiences of others that subsequently enable risking of the self. Courage is required for successful risk-taking. Imaginative wisdom and improvisation are required for the successful and prudent de-centering and betraying of harmful norms. Empathy is required to motivate risk-taking and the de-centering of the self in solidarity with oppressed people. Forgiveness is required to help heal wounds that are inflicted in the course of necessary, unavoidable agonism and disagreement between solidary allies. As a virtue, ethical solidarity thus participates in something like the unity of the virtues as described by Aristotle, yet it is understood as organized towards a future-oriented and visionary enactment of an as-yet-unrealized form of human community. In the final chapter, I characterize this utopian vision of community as taking "the human" as an unrealized and always-deferred *telos* which is elaborated concretely through a multiplicity and variety of visions of human experience and life.

As promised earlier, I now attempt to describe a series of examples of *concrete* ways in which actions of ethical solidarity can support the intelligibility of diverse others. Solidary allies undertake a daily, habitual practice of identifying and responding critically

[20] In Chapter 4, I discuss the concept of "the human" that solidary allies are loyal to at length.

to cultural, social, linguistic, and symbolic foreclosures against a variety of human lives and identities. This practice is, crucially, an *active* practice in the world, in interaction with others. As Erika Faith Feigenbaum has argued, the expression of "indignant anger" by heterosexual allies of the LGBTQ community over, for example, same-sex marriage bans "may attest to their personal emotions and empathy, but their consistent public resistance and support would more directly interrupt heterosexist privilege."[21] Transformations of consciousness are critical for the practice of ethical solidarity, as I argued in Chapter 2, but these transformations will not make any substantial changes in support of the human flourishing of others without complementary action in the world. Such action will likely prove uncomfortable or risky even for individuals who occupy a standpoint of systemic privilege, as Scheman has shown.

A variety of activities could constitute important solidary action in the world for heterosexual allies of the LGBTQ community. Certain actions take place as discrete individual acts of solidarity rather than as daily habits. Some heterosexual allies in long-term committed partnerships choose explicitly not to get married, in solidarity with gay and lesbian couples who are barred by law from marrying one another. Others choose to go ahead and marry, but ask that guests to the wedding donate to LGBTQ activist groups instead of giving traditional gifts.[22] The existence of "gay-straight alliances," or GSA's, also attests to concrete forms of solidary action. Often in conjunction with such organizations, heterosexual allies participate in the "Day of Silence," which is an annual

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[21] Erika Faith Feigenbaum, "Heterosexual Privilege: The Political and the Personal.," *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 2.

[22] I acknowledge that marriage has been criticized and problematized by both feminists and queer theorists as a social institution that supports hetero-patriarchy. My intent here is to exhibit some of the ways in which actual individuals have expressed their solidarity with gay and lesbian couples who would choose to marry if it were legal.

protest on college campuses against the silencing of LGBTQ people through violence, harassment, and bias. Additional examples of heterosexual allies acting in ethical solidarity with the LGBTQ community include: their presence, visibility, and voice at rallies for LGBTQ rights; their support of lesbian and gay independent bookstores and other LGBT-friendly businesses; their boycott of institutions such as churches, country clubs, or businesses that discriminate against LGBTQ people; their monetary or volunteer support of LGBTQ activist organizations; and their participation in LGBTQ cultural events such as Pride events or parades, art exhibits, concerts, or film screenings.

Other solidary interventions take place at the linguistic/symbolic level and more directly problematize and disturb constricting social norms, including more substantial risks to the subjectivity of heterosexual allies. One important act of solidarity for heterosexual allies is to *refrain from defending themselves* against accusations by others that they are gay. Whenever one acts against the prevailing structures of power and the norms that dictate one's subject-position in a "world," one can expect backlash. If I participate in any acts of solidarity with LGBTQ people, I can expect at some point to be labeled "gay" or "queer" or some other term intended as an insult by heterosexual people who feel threatened by my actions. To respond with denial or defensiveness, however, would be to validate the accuser's belief that being gay, queer, or some other non-heterosexual identity is, in fact, a bad thing to be.

Furthermore, heterosexual allies have more positive interventions available to them when it comes to disturbing the normative presumptions of a "world." Many heterosexual allies who are in committed relationships now refer to their significant other as a "partner" rather than a boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, or wife. The sustained and

widespread use of this gender-neutral term has, on my view, destabilizing potential against heteronormative social structures of meaning. If enough people of all varieties of sexual and gender identity begin referring to their romantic partners *as* "partners," it becomes difficult if not impossible to detect, at least at first blush, what the speaker's apparent sexual identity is.[23] Even beyond use of the term "partner," some solidary allies whose sexual preferences always involve an individual of the opposite sex or gender choose to identify with the term "queer," sometimes for political reasons or because they do not feel that they fit or support the normative scripts for heterosexual people.

Beyond solely thinking about the ways in which individual or collective solidary action within a "world" can shift the norms and systems of meanings of that "world" to become more supportive of a variety of human lives, it will also be important to consider what role inhabiting multiple "worlds" plays in supporting human flourishing. Lugones has described, as I have discussed, the significance of "world"-traveling for both recognizing diverse others in their full humanity as well as disturbing our ease in our own "world" so that formerly invisible and potentially harmful norms can be made visible.

It also remains to be said that there is an important role for "worlds" in which one *does* feel at ease, comfortable, or "at home." These social locations can provide spaces of support and relief when existence in other "worlds" is difficult, oppressive, or unlivable. The relationship between the need to "world"-travel in solidarity with diverse others and the need for a supportive "home" is one of unresolved tension. Cressida Heyes writes, "It is both necessary and troubling to seek out a home as a gendered or sexual being: necessary because community, recognition, and stability are essential to human

[23] I say "apparent" because, for bisexual or transgender individuals for example, not all identifications of the gender identity of each member of a couple gives a straightforward or accurate picture of the sexual identities of the individuals involved.

flourishing and political resistance, and troubling because those very practices too often congeal into political ideologies and group formations that are exclusive or hegemonic."[24] Heyes gives an apt description of the necessary benefits as well as the intrinsic risks of having a "world" which feels like "home."

The tension of these dynamics reproduces itself in the question of how we ought to organize ourselves politically for change. That is, how can we negotiate between the feeling of "home" that one often has with others who share one's own identity category/ies and the need to "world"-travel as a solidary ally? What are the dangers that we have historically faced when "home" becomes too appealing? In what follows, I mount an argument that we must once and for all move away from mobilizing on the basis of identity politics, moving instead to a method of agitating for social transformation on the basis of solidarity.

Escaping Identity Politics

Allison Weir claims that "'we' is possible only through an orientation to solidarity, a commitment to and identification with a 'we' … a transformative identity politics based on transformative identifications."[25] The model of "identity politics" Weir has in mind is an extremely different model from traditional identity politics. For Weir, as discussed in Chapter 2, our identifications are constructed on the basis of our solidarities and our shared values. The "old" identity politics, in contrast, constructs itself on the basis of self-interest.

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[24] Cressida J. Heyes, "Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory: The Case of Transgender.," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 28, no. 4 (Summer2003 2003): 1097.
[25] Allison Weir, "Global Feminism and Transformative Identity Politics.," *Hypatia* 23, no. 4 (December 2008): 128.

Richard Rorty, whose treatment of solidarity in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* has been so influential within philosophy, denies that universal human solidarity is possible because, he argues, solidarities always rely on us/them group constructions. Rorty's fundamental analysis that the judgment "suffering and cruelty are bad" is what unites us as human beings seems a flat and impoverished understanding of human commonality. Though I agree with Rorty that solidarity is created rather than found, we disagree about the kind of claims that we can make about what binds us together as human beings.

Rorty's treatment of human beings takes the isolated individual as the appropriate unit of contemplation because he does not view any characteristic as anchoring a pre-given human commonality. For Rorty, there is no such thing as an "intrinsic nature" of human beings. In contrast, I focus on the individual as she or he is constructed *in relation to others* as fundamental to a consideration of the human, particularly insofar as all human beings share an essential vulnerability to one another as well as the need for care and recognition. Rorty's focus on the isolated individual ignores the fragile social process of development that produces independently thinking, rational adults. Furthermore, Rorty's embrace of the Nietzschean self-creating "strong poet" ignores the degree to which *collective action* is required in order to create new possibilities within social "worlds," as discussed above.[26]

I argue that, *qua* vulnerable human beings, we have more in common than not and the variety of goods that we want out of life (the minimum of conditions necessary for

[26] As one who embraces virtue ethics, I agree with Alasdair MacIntyre's claim in *After Virtue* that when faced with the choice between Nietzsche and Aristotle, we ought to choose Aristotle. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, Third Edition*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 109-120

human flourishing) tend to converge more than they diverge. From such convergence I believe we can generate a notion of solidarity-as-humans that supports other human beings in the most basic conditions necessary for them to achieve a personal (and communal) level of human flourishing.[27] I argue that Rorty's understanding of solidarity as inherently antagonistic ("us" versus "them") relies on a model of self-interested identity politics. A transformative model of universal human solidarity—of ethical solidarity—overcomes us/them binaries precisely insofar as individuals begin to release their grip on the importance of their own self-interest and their sense of identity as finished, complete, or closed-off.

One of the main goals of my project is to define a new conception of solidarity that can function effectively in the aftermath of identity politics. The rise of the concept of intersectional identity—the intermeshing of multiple identity categories—has led to a crisis for identity politics. Identity politics is a mode of making rights-claims by agitating on behalf of an (internally homogenous) oppressed group which has been excluded from equal rights or participation on the basis of its marginalized identity. This mode of advocating for equality has proved somewhat successful in the past (e.g. – the U.S. civil rights movement primarily by and for black Americans), but faces contemporary theoretical criticism because it tends to make problematic claims about sameness and difference and seems limited to mobilizing us/them binaries.[28] Rather than thinking in terms of "categories" of people (or, less charitably, "special interest groups"), the

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[27] See my discussion of Martha Nussbaum in Chapter 1.
[28] For two critiques on this point, see Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) and Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

perspective of ethical solidarity views *all* people against the standard of being treated *as human* in social practice.

The concept of solidarity helps to explain and guide internally heterogeneous social and political movements that agitate against oppression, discrimination, and injustice. Unlike identity politics, solidarity is able to account for the active participation and commitment of people who are not directly affected by such oppression and discrimination. To the extent that organizing on the basis of self-interest obstructs organizing on the basis of other-regarding interest, identity politics can actually be undermining of solidarity. On a popular scale, the 2008 presidential primary race between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton made the crisis of identity politics appallingly clear. Democratic black women were expected to "choose" between their identity as black—and vote for the black male candidate—or as a woman—and vote for the white female candidate. The resulting discourse in the mainstream media about who had it worse off—and therefore who would benefit most from their candidate's election—blacks vs. women, was dubbed "the oppression Olympics" by many critics. Ironically, this binary discourse reinforces the invisibility of whiteness as it attaches to "woman," and maleness as it attaches to "black," rendering invisible the experience and identity of black women.[29] An intersectional analysis brings these elisions to the fore and questions the rationale for lining up behind the candidate that most closely resembles

[29] For more on the issue of the invisibility of oppressed intersectional identities, see Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, *All the women Are White, all the Blacks are men, but some of us are brave: Black women's studies* (Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1982).

one's own identity, particularly as that process requires some people (in this case, black women) to have to "choose" between equally significant aspects of themselves.[30]

With identity politics serving as a backdrop, solidarity has often been defined—both in previous academic and contemporary non-academic uses—as dependent upon shared identity or experience, as in the solidarity of women or the solidarity of black people.[31] My conception of ethical solidarity is not based on shared identity or experience and resists propping up "us/them" binaries. Rather, I argue that solidary allies practice solidarity out of a sense of shared ethical and political *values*. Solidary allies share a commitment to treating all human beings *as human* in social practice; they are therefore predisposed to act in solidarity with those who are being dehumanized or oppressed. As I see it, solidarity is a motivating value—the kind of value we hold so closely that we orient our lives around it. Asserting a sense of common interest on the basis of shared values, my conception of ethical solidarity avoids relying on extended accounts of empathy or sympathy to justify an individual's interest in the well-being of others. The kinds of associations that solidary allies cultivate are identifications-with others, on the basis of shared values, in support of human flourishing. Solidary allies *value the human*.

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[30] This is not to say that such aspects can be easily—or ever—separated out from one another. Intersectional analysis specifically rejects the simplistic notion that "Black woman" = "Black" + "Woman".

[31] Clearly these claims have resonance for the 2008 election, as I have pointed out. There is a further background to this particular example, however. White feminists have famously called for solidarity among women, implicitly assuming that all women's experiences are the same (and implicitly white, heterosexual, and middle-class). Women of color have shown the deep problems with this homogenizing gesture towards solidarity—a critique that centers on insights of intersectionality. The Black Panthers movement also generalized and homogenized the experience of all (male) blacks in its call for solidarity, alienating the experience of many black *women* in the movement. For deeper analysis of these issues, see Brenda Lyshaug, "Solidarity without "Sisterhood"? Feminism and the Ethics of Coalition Building," *Politics & Gender* 2, no. 01 (2006): 77-100 and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991).

Coalition versus Solidarity

There is a pressing need for a new vision of social change in the wake of the failure of identity politics. Even tempered by a notion of intersectionality, the scheme by which identity politics conceptually organizes the world *itself forecloses* the possibilities for solving the problems identity politics was meant to address, since it is often people who occupy *privileged* positions that could most effectively make needed social changes to alleviate oppressions perpetrated on the basis of group identity. The organization of social movements on the basis of shared self-interest has produced limited successes, but such strategies are incapable of describing or accounting for individuals' motivations for social activism that derive from other sources.

Relationships of solidarity are simply not intelligible solely on the basis of self-interest. Because the actions of solidary allies often tend to work *against* the "interests" of privileged identity groups they belong to, relationships of solidarity are motivated by a different sort of interest than conventional "self-interest." Without a concept like solidarity, how does one explain the behavior of individuals who reject their (unearned) power and privilege, such as anti-racist whites or anti-heterosexist heterosexuals? It is surely not in one's direct "self-interest" to reject one's social benefits, yet we see that this can and does occur.[32] We need the concept of solidarity to name and explain these kinds of relationships and actions. Further, as many scholars have noted,[33] problems of oppression, discrimination, and systemic violence are not problems that can be solved solely by those who are victimized by the system. To make progress beyond a certain

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[32] Furthermore, extending the notion of "self-interest" to cover these cases by counting anything that makes one happy as "self-interest" seriously dilutes the concept.

[33] I am thinking in particular of Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984).

threshold, those who are privileged and members of dominant groups have to get on board. The completion of the work to overcome racism, sexism, and heterosexism rests on the possibility for social justice movements to recruit white anti-racists, male feminists, and straight LGBTQ allies, etc. An understanding of solidary practice as virtuous explains how solidary allies can alienate their self-interest (understood as exceeding the minimum necessary conditions for human flourishing) and yet be tied to an as-yet-unrealized *telos* of human being—one in which new, diverse forms of community create greater possibilities for livable lives.

The question of self-interest and the other-regarding motivation of solidary allies brings me to a necessary conceptual distinction between "solidarity" and "coalition." Up to this point I have made a number of connections between the practice of solidarity and the cultivation of the virtues. It will be helpful to keep this relationship in mind while distinguishing solidarity from coalition. Just as, for Aristotle, the practice of virtue is intended to bring about happiness and flourishing (*eudaimonia*), and *eudaimonia* is only achieved over the course of a lifetime, so is solidarity an ongoing project and disposition cultivated over the course of a lifetime. The practice of ethical solidarity is a long-term, pervasive commitment to acting in support and recognition of the full humanity of others. In contrast, coalition is the short-term joining together of a collective of people or groups for the sake of achieving a mutually valued goal.

The distinction between solidarity and coalition relates very closely to the motivations for each. Solidarity work, as necessarily related to making connections across differences—sometimes very great differences, and sometimes even with complete strangers—means that the motivations for such work are not generally self-interested

motivations in the most straightforward meaning of the word. For example, heterosexual allies of LGBTQ individuals do not agitate for the dismantling of oppressive heteronormative systems out of self-interest, since it would seem that the interest of heterosexuals is very well-served in a system designed (exclusively) for heterosexuals. I reject the notion that work in the service of the human flourishing of others is "self-interested" work in a conventional application of that term.

Coalitional work, however, is by its very nature motivated out of self-interest. Coalitions form when two or more individuals or groups come together on the basis of a specific shared goal. The reasons or motivations for *having* that goal may vary from person to person or group to group, but the desire to achieve the goal *for the sake of* the individual or group is what motivates the coalition. Coalition is thus generally sought as a more powerful tool towards the achievement of such goals than would be available in pursuing the goal individually or separately. The relationship amongst the members of a coalition is thus intrinsically limited only to the activities required to accomplish the goal and has no necessary continuation beyond its accomplishment.

In distinguishing solidarity from coalition, I do not wish to denigrate the value of coalitions or coalitional work. There are many compelling reasons for groups to engage in coalitional work, and there are compelling reasons for groups to maintain a distinct sense of group-identity separate from other groups. I do, however, want to question the long-term consequences of relying upon coalitions to accomplish the ultimate ends of work in support of human flourishing and livable lives. To clarify the differences between coalitional approaches and solidarity approaches, I examine the work of legal

scholar Catherine Smith on the relationship between the black community and the LGBTQ community.

In her article, "Queer as Black Folk?,"[34] Smith criticizes the decision by many LGBTQ individuals and organizations to utilize the rhetoric that the struggle for LGBTQ rights is "the same as" the struggle for African-American civil rights. It is not my intent here to dispute the point that utilizing "same-as" rhetoric actually *discourages* the black community's participation in the LGBT-rights struggle. On this particular point and in other respects, I agree with Smith's analysis. What I do want to highlight and critique are the underlying assumptions that Smith makes about our motivations for acting on behalf of others and the relationship of empathy to self-interest.

Smith begins by arguing that the potential organizing strategy of the LGBT-rights movement, which views the experiences of heteronormativity and homophobia as "the same as" the experiences of white supremacy and racism, is not the optimal approach to recruiting black allies or eliciting black empathy. Smith argues that setting up the two identities as "the same" implies that at face value they are already different. In other words, to say that LGBTQ oppression is "the same as" black oppression is to implicitly assume that there are no black individuals in the LGBTQ community, nor are there LGBTQ individuals in the black community. Right off the bat, the discourse of "same as" falls into the trap of imagining all LGBTQ individuals as white, and all black individuals as heterosexual. This discourse, then, fails to grasp the intersectionality of identities and of oppressions. Smith continues by pointing out that the *reason* LGBTQ groups make sameness arguments is because they seek the empathy of others who have been "discriminated against, assaulted, or outcast because of some characteristic" and

[34] Catherine E. Smith, "Queer as Black Folk?," *Wisconsin Law Review* 2007, no. 2 (2007): 379-407.

who understand the many emotions it provokes, including "anger, frustration, and isolation."[35] The empathy desired here, and which the "sameness" rhetoric is intended to evoke, is that of an oppressed people seeking solace and support from other oppressed people. Smith argues that appeals to sameness backfire, however, by triggering in-group/out-group dynamics, which she explains via social identity theory.

In brief, Smith's argument is that beginning a conversation about how the experiences of bias and discrimination of LGBTQ and black persons are "the same" *invites* discussion of the ways in which they are *not* the same, thus triggering defensiveness and expressions of loyalty to one group over another. Smith concludes that the appropriate work-around to this problem is to build coalitions between the LGBTQ community and the black community around their *common interests*—what she calls "superordinate goals."[36] Smith utilizes this approach explicitly and self-consciously as a means to *motivate* members of one group to assist members of the other, on the basis of self-interest. She writes, "While I do not like the idea that the only way to motivate some people is to play on their self-interest, I do not think that we have the luxury to ignore what may be a reality. There are other responses to this reality, such as working within your own in-group for social justice."[37]

There are four major problems with assuming this position, each deriving from the insistence on "self-interest" as the central motivating factor for any other-regarding action. First, on my view it is not a "luxury" to think that we may be able to motivate people on a basis other than their self-interest. In fact, the possibility of motivating a significant number of people to act on the basis of empathy for fellow human beings *as*

[35] Ibid., 383.
[36] Ibid., 401.
[37] Ibid., 401, footnote 109.

such is the most basic principle enabling a practice of ethical solidarity. Second, even if we presume that some people can only be motivated to act in their own self-interest, the alternative response to this reality ought not to be *giving up on* those people by simply turning inward to one's own social group. Rather we ought to assist such people in expanding their capacity for empathy towards others by opening their gaze outward, away from their own group, and into the "worlds" of others with the attendant encouragement to practice epistemological humility. When these individuals refuse to "world"-travel themselves, solidary allies can help to expand the empathy of these others by sharing their own experiences of "world"-traveling, speaking about the new perspectives and knowledge they have gained through such travel, and insisting upon the significance of the relationship that exists between individuals simply as fellow human beings.

Furthermore, Smith's advice only seems rational when it is delivered to those who do not wield the most power in society. Imagine if someone were to counsel intensely self-interested rich straight white men to "work within their own in-group for social justice," and the absurdity of the suggestion is clear. Third, coalitional actions on the basis of self-interest fail even to view members of the allied group as fully human beings. Coalitions that are formed on the basis of self-interest necessarily have an instrumental view of the role of their allies as *means* to achieving the superordinate goal. Treating others primarily as a means to one's own ends is a failure of "identification-with" them to recognize their full humanity and engage them as fellow members of the human community. Fourth and finally, we should consider the ways in which a shared humanity—a shared vulnerable human condition—can operate as the commonality

between people that motivates empathy, rather than a shared oppression. The impulse to organize around the basis of shared oppressions is an instinct that is motivated by decades of identity politics.[38] Given the many ways in which continuing to utilize identity politics is harmful both for the oppressed and for their allies, we should be loathe to continue organizing ourselves primarily on the basis of shared oppressions.

The most fundamental disagreement I have with Smith is the clear implication of her argument that coalition is only possible because of the self-interest of the coalitional parties. In the same gesture that she uses to unite the LGBTQ and black communities, she explicitly excludes individuals or communities who could be allies to their causes but who are not themselves targets of oppression. In other words: forming a coalition on the basis of self-interest explicitly rejects more long-term and, I argue, sustainable alliances on the basis of ethical solidarity.

Smith writes, "LGBTQ people and blacks do not have to be the same to recognize that they are being devalued for the benefit of those who have placed them in the out-group. At these intersections, we will recognize how our mutual marginalization benefits those in the in-group and allows us to attack the underlying assumptions that are used to justify it."[39] While I concur that the devaluation of LGBTQ people and blacks through systems of heterosexism and racism is intended for the benefit of the "in-group," i.e. – white heterosexuals, I reject the implication that members of this "in-group" are (on the basis of *their* "self-interests") barred from acting in solidarity with the LGBTQ and black communities. It is precisely the potential for traitorous action against one's group, as discussed in Chapter 2, that gives power to the solidary actions of individuals from

[38] For a sustained consideration of the resentment at the heart of movements that are constituted on the basis of shared oppression, see Brown, *States of Injury.*
[39] Smith, "Queer as Black Folk?," 406.

privileged social groups. Traitorous action is real action against the "interest" of harmful normative systems that support the privilege of some at the expense of oppressed others. As discussed above, solidary allies will practice virtuous loyalty or treachery based on a traitorous practical wisdom which is other-regarding and supportive of diverse possibilities of human flourishing—not just flourishing for oneself or those like oneself.

The "interest" of solidary allies is better understood in terms of *values*. That is, individuals-in-coalition are interested primarily in *their own* communities' goals because their values are centrally focused on sustaining *that group*. In contrast, solidary allies are "interested" primarily in the flourishing of all human beings—they are other-regarding insofar as they *value the human*. Organizing on the basis of coalition, then, may be practical and useful for the accomplishment of certain strategic short-term goals. However, the potential disruption of dominant power structures created by solidarity across group differences—especially through actions that are traitorous to privileged groups—makes a greater contribution to overcoming multiple interlocked systemic oppressions.

A better model than making "sameness" arguments or organizing on the basis of self-interest is to participate in the practice of ethical solidarity. If we choose to ignore potential allies from privileged social groups, we risk allowing narrow norms to continue to (mis)shape the lives of the oppressed. Only through a practice of ethical solidarity across differences in social identity will the norms and expectations of our "worlds" start to change. Brenda Lyshaug argued this point in her 2006 essay "Solidarity without 'Sisterhood'? Feminism and the Ethics of Coalition Building."[40] In that essay, Lyshaug argues that coalitions based solely on the self-interest of the united groups are

[40] Lyshaug, "Solidarity without "Sisterhood"?."

impoverished forms of political movement. "It is difficult to see how a bond based *solely* on self-interest could sustain a durable sense of connection or a sense of mutual accountability among those whom it unites … In such a union, one coalition partner can be expected to abandon another as soon as she is no longer useful."[41] Instead of a model of coalition in which self-interested identity groups come together temporarily to work for superordinate goals, Lyshaug argues that we need a model of coalitional politics that is transformative. The transformations that take place through identifying with diverse others across difference are supportive of human flourishing through mutual recognition and affirmation. In particular, the recognition and affirmation of those who do not "fit" narrow, dominant social norms *by those who do fit* them is a powerful expression of resistance against harmful normativity precisely insofar as it undermines the perpetuation of those norms.

Lyshaug's call for a politics of personal transformation that goes beyond temporary and self-interested coalitions coincides with my own attempt to offer a transformative practice of ethical solidarity as a means to supporting human flourishing. She argues, "Would-be feminist allies must transform the attitudes and dispositions in themselves that often accompany privilege and that block genuine mutual recognition and understanding."[42] Lyshaug's argument is that solidary allies ought to engage in practices of self-transformation aimed at cultivating an "enlarged sympathy" with diverse others. Through identifications informed by this enlarged sympathy, she thinks that we can develop more powerfully transformative relationships across differences of privilege and identity. I fully support this project, and I think Lyshaug has done a careful job of

[41] Ibid., 81.
[42] Ibid., 83.

elaborating and avoiding the many dangers that this form of identification and sympathy engenders. I view my own work on the epistemological transformations that are needed for ethical solidarity as a closely complementary project.

Displacing "Freedom" and "Tolerance"

In closing, I turn to the question of why ethical solidarity is a better means of ensuring diverse possibilities for human flourishing than competing notions like "freedom" or "tolerance." Both Nussbaum and Butler seem to suggest that their projects support freedom, although for very different reasons. Nussbaum sees her capabilities approach as outlining a minimum that all human beings can agree everyone ought to have, and she claims that beyond this minimum, individuals are free to choose their own comprehensive conceptions of the good. Nussbaum has already been critiqued for importing what are seen as Western liberal individualistic values into her account of the universal human capabilities.[43] My interest, however, is in challenging the inherited notion that the diversity of human lives that inflects the variety of forms of human flourishing is safeguarded by emphasizing the freedom of private individuals.

Theoretically, Nussbaum argues that there is a division between institutional and individual responsibility for human flourishing that corresponds to the division between public and private life. Furthermore, on her view, the realm of the ethical must stop short of private personal life, for fear that ethical responsibility will harm the personal flourishing of individuals. "We can see that this division between the institutional and

[43] See, for example, Carol C. Gould, *Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

the ethical corresponds to a familiar distinction, in liberal (and especially political-liberal) theory, between the political sphere and the spheres of people's own personal (or shared) comprehensive conceptions of value."[44] This theoretical position is only possible if one thinks that the arrangement of society is such that one could conceivably choose and actualize one's own comprehensive conception of the good. As Butler points out, "If we take the field of the human for granted, then we fail to think critically—and ethically—about the consequential ways that the human is being produced, reproduced, deproduced."[45] Because Nussbaum fails to take into account the ways in which social and cultural norms inflict particular sorts of harms (associated especially with "unintelligibility") and constrain the possibilities for livable lives, she does not see that individuals never escape power relations in their private lives such that they could make a "free" choice.

The embrace of a political discourse of "freedom" and "tolerance" is only compelling if one accepts that the possibilities for livable lives are already widely available, and that these possibilities will be sufficient to sustain the personal flourishing of all human individuals. The liberal individualist view of the role of freedom tends to ignore, furthermore, the degree to which we are implicated in one another's lives as fellow human beings. As Lugones and Butler have argued, the issue of *recognition as human* of marginalized individuals by privileged individuals has a significant impact on whether the lives of the marginalized are livable or not. Lisa Tessman has also argued—against the position Nussbaum articulates—that moral goodness cannot lie with the

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[44] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 310.
[45] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 222.

pursuit of one's own individual flourishing if one's well-being is predicated on the lack of well-being of others.[46]

Even Butler herself embraces "freedom" as an important political goal, though for different reasons: "But there is a normative aspiration here, and it has to do with the ability to live and breathe and move and would no doubt belong somewhere in what is called a philosophy of freedom."[47] On her view, the quest for alternate life possibilities is a necessity for survival, and she expresses here the need for those possibilities as a need for freedom. In the sense that one is free if one is not constrained into an unlivable life by the normative structure of the "world" one inhabits, I support Butler's insistence that what is needed is a philosophy of freedom. I would caution, however, that blanket calls for the freedom of possibility—particularly with reference to gender or sexual difference—tend to avoid engaging with difficult normative questions. Heyes argues, for example, that transgender theorists' calls for "freedom" of any and all gender expression ignores the privileged normative weight that certain gender expressions carry in different "worlds." "Gender expression is thus not only an aesthetic choice about cosmetics or hairstyle, skirts or suits. It is also implicated in politically fraught behaviors, economic marginalization and exploitation, and political consciousness."[48] Because such matters of individual choice have normative consequences, one confronts the difficult task of negotiating one's freedoms with others, in political and ethical discourse, through risks to the self. This is precisely why I advocate an embrace of ethical solidarity as a social and political virtue over and above the related notions of "freedom" and "tolerance."

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[46] Tessman, *Burdened Virtues*, 76.
[47] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 219.
[48] Heyes, "Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory," 1111.

I am suspicious of the call for freedom as closely tied to the call for tolerance, since—as Wendy Brown has argued—"tolerance" as a social virtue tends to operate in ways that are conditioned by structures of power.[49] "[Tolerance] as a mode of late modern governmentality that iterates the normalcy of the powerful and the deviance of the marginal responds to, links, and tames both unruly domestic identities or affinities and nonliberal transnational forces that tacitly or explicitly challenge the universal standing of liberal precepts."[50] Calls for individual freedom and for tolerance of others' individual freedom thus potentially operate, paradoxically, to reinforce narrow norms by implicitly constructing non-normative modes of being as "other" or "deviant" and in need of toleration. On my view, the central problem with embracing "tolerance" is that the very notion seems to regard the norms of social "worlds" as inflexible, thus requiring the courtesy and good will of individuals to "tolerate" those people whose lives deviate from the (unchallenged) norm.

I argue, therefore, that it is a mistake to view *individual freedom* as the paradigm value by which we ought to measure the success of an ethical theory. Instead, the degree to which we are mutually implicated in one another's lives calls for a sustained, engaged, and virtuous struggle to find ways to support one another's human flourishing—a practice of ethical solidarity. As Heyes argues, "Solidarity will founder, however, if we detach ourselves from each other and our mutual implication in favor of a demand for individual freedom."[51] The kind of transformative identification-with that is called for by Heyes, Lyshaug, and Weir only comes about with significant risks to the self, as I have

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[49] Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
[50] Ibid., 8.
[51] Heyes, "Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory," 1117.

argued. A view of the tolerance of individual freedom as the model by which we should organize our society and our ethics refuses such risks to the self as *prima facie* contrary to personal flourishing. I argue instead, with Weir, that the embrace of individual freedom and the identity politics that it often seems to underwrite (as supporting claims based on self-interest) seems to arise "out of a fear of the necessity, in any collectivity, of opening up—to deeper relations to others, to self-critique, to inclusion of difference, to the risk of participation, conflict, and dissent. For all of these often difficult and dangerous forms of opening up are essential to identification."[52] Solidarity is undermined without the concrete and often difficult engagement of individuals with diverse others. Calls for toleration and individual freedom too often mask the fear of sustained dialogue with diverse others, even those others that it seems unthinkable one might ever count as allies or members of one's community.

In the following and final chapter, I will discuss the process and import of political disagreement among solidary allies. That is, given that ethical solidarity requires engagement with diverse others, it is inevitable that one will encounter disagreements about what is fundamental to human flourishing, even among communities that otherwise seem to share the same values. These disagreements raise the question of what norms will be allowed or disallowed with regard to the promotion of diverse forms of human flourishing. Along these lines, I also argue for *forgiveness* as a necessary virtue for the practice of ethical solidarity, particularly as it relates to the risking of the self. Finally, I argue for a notion of "the human" as *telos*—"queer humanism"—as a framework to guide future work on issues of human flourishing. My notion of "queer

[52] Weir, "Global Feminism and Transformative Identity Politics.," 128.

humanism" engages questions of the social imagination and its impact on possibilities for human flourishing, including an investigation of the role of utopian imaginings.

CHAPTER 4

HUMAN SOLIDARITY AND QUEER HUMANISM

> It may be that what is 'right' and what is 'good' consist in staying open to the tensions that beset the most fundamental categories we require, to know unknowingness at the core of what we know, and what we need, and to recognize the sign of life—and its prospects.
>
> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*

Given that ethical solidarity requires engagement with diverse others, it is inevitable that one will encounter disagreements about what is fundamental to human flourishing, even among communities that otherwise seem to share the same values. Disagreement over what aspects of human life are the most fundamental to human dignity and flourishing plagues contemporary human rights scholarship, particularly with regard to the conflicting claims of different cultures. In this chapter, I suggest that such perpetual disagreement is an intrinsic and necessary consequence of the nature of conceptualizing "the human" itself. If meaning is a function of social structures and language use[1], then the meaning of what is characteristically and fundamentally "human" is not fixed with reference to an unchanging reality. I contend that conflicting accounts of "the human"—while philosophically problematic for constructing a shared set of universal, unchanging, and inviolable human rights—should invite inquiry into the conditions that give rise to those conflicting accounts and that such inquiry is productive of the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing.

The invitation to inquire into contradictory claims about what is fundamental to the most basic flourishing of human beings is an invitation to dialogue and to engagement with the Other. As I argued in Chapter 3, the commitment to communal and mutually

[1] See my discussion of social nature of meanings in Chapter 2.

invested engagement through the practice of ethical solidarity is more likely to produce the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing than is a commitment to tolerance or freedom. In this final chapter I will address two distinct issues relating to the problem of disagreements about what is fundamental to human flourishing. First, I discuss the need for, and utility of, engagement in dialogue over such disagreements between solidary allies, including a discussion of the relevant virtues necessary for such dialogue. Second, I introduce the notion of "queer humanism" as the framework for understanding and approaching "the human," with reference to which solidary allies practice ethical solidarity.

"Queer humanism" approaches the concept of "the human" through the multiplication and proliferation of concrete understandings of the variety and diversity of potential human lives and experiences. Rather than using a "least common denominator" approach to what is most fundamental to human flourishing, I want to suggest that we approach the concept of "the human" as a *telos*, understanding and enactment of which can never be fully realized. This queer humanist approach to conceptualizing "the human" engages questions of the social imagination and its impact on possibilities for human flourishing, including an investigation of the role of utopian imaginings.

Negotiating Disagreements: The Politics of Ethical Solidarity

As I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, overly narrow social norms constrict and constrain the possibilities for livable lives for all people. Solidary allies engage in the daily and sustained practice of conceptualizing and finding ways to

welcome diverse possibilities for livable lives, particularly for those unlike themselves. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler writes:

> And what are our politics such that we are in whatever way possible, both conceptualizing the possibility of the livable life and arranging for its institutional support? There will always be disagreement about what this means, and those who claim that a single political direction is necessitated by virtue of this commitment will be mistaken.[2]

Because, as Butler suggests, there will always be disagreement about what constitutes "the livable life" for humans, there cannot therefore be a "single political direction" dictated by the commitment to ethical solidarity. The consequence is that political disagreement among solidary allies is unavoidable. The question then remains how solidary allies are to negotiate political and moral disagreements—including disagreements over what sorts of lives should be supported as fundamentally human.

It seems to me that there are two general sorts of disagreement at issue here. On the one hand, there is disagreement that takes place amongst a community of solidary allies who already tend to share the same values. Because the values of the community are already held in common, it seems likely that these sorts of disagreements would hinge upon the particular sorts of political strategies or means-to-ends tactics that ought to be adopted in pursuit of the realization of those shared values. Such disagreements may play out, in their uglier forms, as power struggles over whose take on "the movement" is the "true" one. I am thinking, for example, of debates over the meaning of the term "feminist." Productive forms of this kind of disagreement engage questions about the consequences of different political actions for a variety of human lives. For example, the LGBT community and their allies often debate the value of making "gay marriage" a political priority.

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[2] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 226.

On the other hand, there are disagreements that take place over fundamental values—what sorts of lives ought to count and be accepted as potentially livable human lives. These disagreements take place at a fundamental level and involve questions of who will be recognized as living an accepted form of human life. Thus, for example, the fight over the American practice of slavery involved a clash over whether black people would and should be recognized as fully human, and the battle with Nazi ideology involved a struggle over the recognition of "non-Aryans" (like Jewish people) and "gypsies" or gay people as fully human.

Fundamental disagreements about who will be recognized as fully human also work in ways that are not as easily or quickly identifiable, however. For example, the treatment of criminals is often dehumanizing. The practice of capital punishment in the United States and the public support it receives is perhaps one of the more easily identifiable ways in which Americans, as a community, fail to fully recognize the humanity of those we sentence to death. While there is significant contemporary work being done, particularly by feminist theorists, on rectifying the injustices of the criminal justice and the prison systems, one seldom thinks of the need to treat, for example, Nazi perpetrators of war crimes as human beings whose lives deserve recognition and dignity. For the contemporary world, there is a particular urgency to questions of how or whether to recognize the full humanity of criminals or those we deem to be perpetrators of especially heinous acts, given, for example, how we treat terrorism suspects as well as convicted terrorists. Thus the question of whose lives deserve recognition as fully human cuts both ways: such fundamental disagreements operate in more "obvious" forms, when dealing with situations such as slavery and the Holocaust, as well as in less "obvious"

forms, when dealing with people who are generally viewed as having "given up" or "lost" their right to be treated as human beings with the full complement of human rights and dignity.

Criminals whose crimes harm others seem to serve as a test case for the limits of solidarity. It is an important practice of ethical solidarity that we not dehumanize or mistreat criminals any more than their actions dehumanize themselves already. However, given the strong potential for many such criminals to continue to abandon recognition of the humanity and human rights of others, we cannot extend all of the conditions necessary for the minimum of human flourishing to those who would utilize those conditions to undermine others' flourishing. Solidary allies must therefore engage in a difficult balancing act between risking the self in support of others and protecting the self from harms against human flourishing. I will return to a more detailed discussion of this point later in this chapter.

Disagreements within Communities of Shared Values

The problem of disagreements within a solidary community that shares the same fundamental values is not "resolved"—but rather *accounted for* or *grappled with*—by numerous theorists, both philosophers and feminists. I think that efforts to theorize effective and just forms of discourse ethics are perhaps the best guide we have at present for negotiating such internal disagreements. I am thinking, for example, of Jürgen Habermas, Seyla Benhabib, and in particular Jodi Dean's work in *Solidarity of Strangers*[3]. As in Chapter 2 with regard to feminist epistemologies, I also think important

[3] Jodi Dean, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

lessons can be drawn from the history of work in the feminist movement on issues of difference and identity, particularly with regard to race. My own contribution to negotiating this particular form of disagreement among solidary allies is to suggest that there is a significant role for the work of ethical solidarity in *risking the self* and the virtues associated with undertaking such risks. Ethical solidarity and the associated virtues that aid in solidary practice are well-suited to facilitating dialogue over internal political disagreements as well as helping participants recover from the emotional and relational injuries that inevitably result therefrom.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the work of ethical solidarity requires the work of other virtues for its effective operation—particularly courage, humility, and imaginative wisdom and improvisation. In any situation where one finds oneself in political opposition against others with whom one shares life-orienting values like those which ground ethical solidarity, it is crucial to approach those one opposes (politically) *as allies* rather than as enemies. The practice of ethical solidarity thus implies approaching these sorts of political disagreements with (epistemological) humility, insofar as one understands that other individuals are in a more reliable position than oneself to articulate the conditions they view as most supporting livable lives for themselves. This is not to say that one cannot engage in respectful and loving dialogue which includes critique with diverse others, but rather that it is a mistake of pride—particularly for privileged allies—to presume that one's own view is more authentically ethical than another's.

Furthermore, the practice of solidarity requires courage in risking one's sense of certainty or comfort with one's own political views when they conflict with others'. The virtue of courage is crucial for oppressed as well as privileged individuals, although the

situations in which courage must be drawn upon are notably different for each, and perhaps even result in different forms of courage. Courage is required on the part of oppressed individuals or communities when they must articulate a vision of possible livable lives in the face of systemic oppression. Speaking up and against dominant structures of power and the powerful individuals that maintain such structures places oppressed individuals at additional risk because they become targets for retribution or backlash, and such individuals are already vulnerable by virtue of their social position under oppressive conditions. This will be different from the sort of situation where privileged allies must be courageous in rejecting their privileges or questioning the accuracy or veracity of their views, given their social standpoint with relation to the structures of power. Privileged allies risk less than oppressed allies insofar as social structures of power are configured to protect and support them, and courage is thus required in order to relinquish and reject the protections and benefits that such unjust structures bestow.

I also argue that there is an important role for the virtue of *forgiveness* in the practice of ethical solidarity, particularly with reference to situations of conflict. The virtue of forgiveness will be needed to help heal wounds that are inflicted in the course of necessary and unavoidable agonism and disagreement. As Butler notes, ethical action for humans implies that we will sometimes be in the wrong: "If we are to act ethically … we must avow error as constitutive of who we are."[4] Courage and forgiveness together will be particularly needed for privileged allies in their struggles to overcome initial reactions of guilt and paralysis in the process of coming to understand their privilege. In this particular situation, forgiveness will be not only an other-regarding virtue, but also a self-

[4] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New: Fordham University Press, 2005), 111.

regarding virtue. That is, one must be able to forgive oneself for participating in and benefiting from unjust structures of privilege enough that one can overcome the temptation to guilt-ridden paralysis and move forward towards action that remedies the problem. Perhaps some level of guilt or self-blame in privileged individuals can be motivating and to that extent beneficial for the practice of solidarity, but my point here is that guilt and self-blame are often second-order vices of the privileged that enable them to maintain their privilege by an acknowledgement of that privilege, but in bad faith. It is a guilt without any practical effect. Such guilt produces an inability to act because of the fear that *any* action one takes will be tainted by one's privilege. As Marilyn Frye relates, this fear is not always unfounded.

Frye notes that sometimes the mere fact that members of dominant social groups have the *possibility to choose* to act, to *decide whether or not* to turn their attention to the oppressed, can be a source of additional pain for oppressed people. Speaking in the context of feminist work against racism, she writes, "Every choice or decision I make is made in a matrix of options. Racism distorts and limits that matrix in various ways."[5] Frye recounts an anecdote in which her decision to participate in a white women's consciousness-raising group to identify racism in their lives caused a black woman acquaintance to criticize their group "for ever thinking [they] could achieve their goals by working only with white women."[6] When Frye explained that the group was only meant to serve as a starting-place for their anti-racist work and they would later organize a group open to all women, the same woman "exploded with rage: '*You* decided'"![7] Frye

[5] Marilyn Frye, *Politics Of Reality - Essays In Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1983), 113.
[6] Ibid., 111.
[7] Ibid., 112.

comes to understand the woman's reaction in the following manner: because of the matrix of options available to Frye as a white woman versus the matrix that limits the options of women of color, any decision Frye chooses to make becomes an exercise of race privilege. Perhaps the situation might have been handled better through more open lines of communication and solicitation of the voices of those oppressed people who would be affected by Frye's actions. On the other hand, there is likely some degree to which no amount of explanation or caution on the part of the white women could avoid triggering anger over their very (privileged) freedom to choose their course of action.

Members of privileged or dominant groups have many such pitfalls to avoid in their practice of ethical solidarity: becoming too comfortable in their own "world" or epistemological standpoint; interpreting the behaviors of members of oppressed groups in conformity with entrenched stereotypes about the group; assuming an imaginative conception of the human that implicitly possesses dominant social traits; seeking absolution, forgiveness, or relying on explicit guidance from oppressed groups in order to assuage the guilt of being a member of an oppressing group; and finally, as Frye has revealed, avoiding the moral paralysis that may accompany recognition that even one's very best efforts at fighting one's own privilege may still cause pain to members of oppressed groups.

On the other hand, the practice of ethical solidarity requires members of oppressed social groups to overcome their own unique set of challenges. While it is completely legitimate to expect privileged individuals to do their own legwork and make their own concerted efforts at overcoming their privilege and recognizing,

acknowledging, and valuing individuals and creations from oppressed groups,[8] privileged allies are not perfect and will make mistakes.[9] This will be true in part because even social movements are executed within enclosing and constricting systems of power. Privileged allies will require some guidance, support, and patient acceptance from those who are members of oppressed groups in order to learn to see differently, to understand the world from a standpoint other than the dominant world-view or from the one where they have become the most "at ease."[10]

Perseverance and courage will also be necessary in confronting the almost inevitable risk of hurts that accompany a relationship of solidarity with members of privileged groups. Solidary allies from oppressed groups must have the willingness to reach out and forge a solidary alliance across the structures of power, rather than resolutely turning inward to the familiar members of one's own group or similar oppressed others. As Jean Harvey argues, there is seemingly a significant role for empathetic understanding on the part of the oppressed for their privileged allies; oppressed allies can also exhibit solidarity with the privileged in coming to appreciate the struggle that privileged allies undergo in learning to see and understand their privilege.[11] We are all working together, across various divides, in making a world of the diversely human. This is how I understand humanism as an ethical practice. All of these actions, particularly because they touch on questions of character, are virtuous practices of ethical

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[8] I am thinking in particular here of Audre Lorde's "Open Letter to Mary Daly" in Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984).
[9] As discussed in Chapter 2, the practice of solidarity is a *practice*: an intentional, motivated repetition that is subject to better and worse articulations but whose goal is continual improvement.
[10] For the implications of being "at ease" in a "world," see Chapter 2, p. 88-89.
[11] Jean Harvey, "Moral Solidarity and Empathetic Understanding: The Moral Value and Scope of the Relationship," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 38, no. 1 (March 2007): 22-37.

solidarity. The virtue of forgiveness will also take on a special relevance for situations of more fundamental conflict with others.

Disagreements over Fundamental Values: Possibilities for Human Solidarity

As discussed above, solidary allies must also face situations of conflict with those that do not share the same fundamental values. In these situations, as well, forgiveness will be a crucial virtue for the practice of ethical solidarity. I focus in particular on the capacity for forgiveness of others with whom one does not necessarily share the same life-orienting values, because this is a key point that differentiates my notion of ethical solidarity from other theoretical conceptions of solidarity. I argued in Chapter 3 that solidarity is a better approach to securing the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing than "tolerance" or "freedom." Particularly with reference to those who do not share one's own fundamental values, the practice of solidarity requires a different approach than the traditional "live and let live" strategy of tolerance. On my view, too often the embrace of "tolerance" masks the refusal to truly engage with diverse others in pursuit of better mutual understanding and the creation of greater possibilities for livable and flourishing human lives.

Moreover, other theoretical descriptions of solidarity often characterize it as necessarily agonistic in the sense of having an "us" versus "them" dynamic. Positioning my own account of solidarity against two other robust accounts—that of Richard Rorty and Sally Scholz—I argue that ethical solidarity as a relation that circumscribes human beings *as such* is possible, desirable, and requires the virtues of forgiveness, courage, and humility that I have argued for above. Rorty argues that human solidarity and the pursuit

of private goods (self-creation) are "equally valid, yet forever incommensurable."[12] On his view, solidarity is created through better sensitizing ourselves to the suffering and pain of others, particularly those who are quite different from ourselves. Rorty parses this increased sensitivity as making "them" seem more like "one of us," and through this continual extension we create an ever-larger notion of who "we" are. He expresses deep skepticism at our ability to extend this sensitivity to all other human beings, however, and argues vehemently that the rhetorical or emotional force of saying "one of us human beings" is far less than that which circumscribes a smaller identity group.

On my view, Rorty underestimates the potential power of the rhetoric of human commonality. I see the force of "the human" as incredibly potent, and in fact it is that very potency which is utilized in favor of a narrow, implicit, invisible norm over and against those who do not meet it and are thus made (or rather defined as) inhuman.[13] That is, individuals who do not meet the norm of "the human" are deprived of the rhetorical power of appeal to shared humanity or human rights. (Such appeals by marginalized populations are instead parsed as pleas for "special rights"—a point I discuss in greater depth later in this chapter.) Rorty's view of the power of "us" explicitly presupposes that the pursuit of private goods is a separate matter from the pursuit of (public) justice—a point I objected to in Chapter 3 on the basis of our shared human vulnerability.[14] This quintessentially liberal view is echoed by Martha Nussbaum when she brackets "the ethical" away from personal choices—a point I have argued against throughout this dissertation. On my view, ethical solidarity creates possibilities for human flourishing by *engaging* with diverse others—even those with whom we

[12] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xv.
[13] I discuss the potency of the concept of "the human" in depth in section III of this chapter.
[14] See Chapter 3, p. 110-111.

vehemently disagree—because we value human beings *as such* and seek to create the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing for all. Such solidarity, when realized, is part of the moral personality of solidary individuals, who seek to realize a certain kind of world in the course of their lives. Because Rorty views the public pursuit of justice and the private pursuit of self-perfection as wholly separate endeavors, he misses the context of shared vulnerability that envelops all human beings in a common human condition and which crosses public/private boundaries.

Rorty relies heavily on the idea that literature will help us to expand our sympathies for others (a point echoed by Martha Nussbaum[15]). I think that this approach to expanding our sympathy to diverse others may be helpful, but as a practice of solidarity it is woefully inadequate. As Erika Feigenbaum rightly points out, private personal empathy or sensitivity to others is insufficient for producing the kind of action-based solidarity that is needed to create real possibilities for livable lives for others.[16] Solidary allies must not only work to expand their private personal empathies for others, but must also act in the world in support of diverse others. Such actions might include political participation of various kinds, consisting in activities such as monetary support of activist organizations, voting and getting out the vote, boycotts, or support of and participation in cultural events, promoting the visibility and acceptance of marginalized communities, etc.

Sally Scholz's more recent account of solidarity also frames it as an inherently agonistic relationship. Scholz argues that political solidarity—the form of solidarity she

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[15] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992).
[16] Erika Faith Feigenbaum, "Heterosexual Privilege: The Political and the Personal.," *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 1-9.

is most concerned with and which most closely connects to my account of ethical solidarity—is a collective formed by individuals who share particular political goals or values. As such, this collective is necessarily formed in opposition to certain others, particularly those others who inflict or support conditions of injustice and oppression. Scholz views political solidarity as "an opposition to something that is human in origin"[17]—namely, various kinds of oppression; therefore it must be in opposition to some particular humans who have created or supported the thing which the solidary collective opposes. In contrast with Rorty, Scholz does not think that human (political) solidarity is impossible because of a limitation on the extension of our sentiments. Rather, because she defines political solidarity as in opposition to some human others, it is logically impossible to have a solidary collective of all human beings.

But on my view, ethical solidarity is "in opposition" to no one, since it is action in support of the human flourishing of *all*. Insofar as ethical solidarity is "oppositional" at all, one might understand it as in opposition to anyone who obstructs human flourishing, but only insofar as and to the extent that they create or sustain that obstruction. My practice of ethical solidarity would be agonistic only in the sense that one would oppose those individuals or communities who had more than the minimum of the conditions for human flourishing and were denying those minimum conditions to others. However, one is still in solidarity with those one "opposes" insofar as one supports the minimum conditions for them, as well. Because solidary allies are not, properly speaking, "in opposition" to any individual or group, they will need to cultivate certain virtues in order to learn how to secure the variety of needs that support diverse forms of human flourishing. Especially for individuals or communities in fundamental conflict, virtues of

[17] Sally J. Scholz, *Political Solidarity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 54.

proper empathy, forgiveness, courage, and imaginative identification will be necessary for the practice of ethical solidarity.

There seems to be a tragic limit to the practice of ethical solidarity when we encounter certain kinds of fundamental conflicts. We must exercise a kind of tragic practical wisdom in dealing with violent individuals such as those who rape, torture, or kill others when we decide to lock them away in prison, for example, in favor of protecting the flourishing of those others whose lives they would continue to destroy. Though solidary allies might want to support the minimum conditions for the possibility of flourishing even for such criminals, extending such support would mean enabling the destruction of the lives of others who do not choose—like these individuals do—to violate the ethical relation between human beings through acts of violence. Though we cannot, therefore, support the minimum of flourishing for individuals who violently and maliciously undermine the lives of others, we will nevertheless remember the humanity of such criminals, even if they forget it in their own lives and destroy it in the lives of their victims. Solidary allies will aim to support as many of the minimum conditions of human flourishing as possible for these individuals, but always within the limits of protecting others from grievous harm at their hands.

Butler writes, "If we forget that we are related to those we condemn, even those we *must* condemn, then we lose the chance to be ethically educated or 'addressed' by a consideration of who they are and what their personhood says about the range of human possibility that exists, even to prepare ourselves for or against such possibilities."[18] In other words, even as solidary allies position themselves against certain values or actions that they condemn as undermining of human flourishing and livable lives for all, they

[18] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 45.

must at the same time maintain an awareness that those people whose actions, attitudes, or values they condemn are nevertheless human beings deserving of dignity and livable lives. Maintaining an awareness of one's relation to those other human beings one may be tempted to condemn *as people*, rather than condemning their particular actions, attitudes, or values, requires the virtue of forgiveness. Without forgiveness, it is difficult if not impossible to separate the deed from the doer, and this conflation undermines the foundational practice of ethical solidarity of protecting the human.

Furthermore, as Butler suggests, it is the possibility of *engagement* with those others with whom we vehemently disagree that occasions the chance to be ethically educated. The experience of concrete expressions of human lives—even of those that we condemn—is always an opportunity to learn something about the range of possibilities of human life, and to consider the ways in which we might attempt to mold or refashion various "worlds" to better support livable lives *even for those with whom we vehemently disagree*. I might harbor a deep disagreement with individuals or communities that view homosexuality as sinful, for example, but as a solidary ally I do not therefore cease to care whether or not they are also able to have livable and flourishing lives. Taking up Catherine Smith's example from Chapter 2 of the difficult conflicts between the black community and the LGBT community, perhaps my values oppose those of a black woman whose values and actions harm the LGBT community. Nevertheless, I support that individual in the struggle against racism because I see both the racism directed against her as well as the homophobia she directs against LGBT individuals as harmful of human flourishing and livable lives for all.

It is extremely difficult if not impossible to specify in generic terms how one might negotiate each given conflict over fundamental values. Each such encounter requires specific expressions of wisdom, courage, and forgiveness. Approaching each situation with the virtues of courage, epistemological humility, and forgiveness will go a long way towards helping us to encounter one another in the full recognition of one another's shared humanity. Our goal as solidary allies must be the creation of diverse possibilities for livable lives. With an eye to supporting the minimum of human dignity for all, I think that we must ask with Butler, "What resources must we have in order to bring into the human community those humans who have not been considered part of the recognizably human? That is the task of a radical democratic theory and practice that seeks to extend the norms that sustain viable life to previously disenfranchised communities."[19] In the service of answering this question, and in keeping with my argument throughout this dissertation, I suggest that ethical solidarity is best practiced with reference to an imaginative framework that *does not take "the human" as given*. Against Rorty, I argue that that which binds us together as human beings is not some fixed, least-common-denominator universal human essence, but rather the variety of concrete, quintessentially human experiences that we share: our sufferings, joys, hopes, fears, and vulnerabilities. Our identification with one another *qua* human beings thus rests on something like Allison Weir's "identification-with" rather than on an underlying, unchanging human essence—a fact that points to the need for a revolution in the way that we conceive of "the human" in imagination.

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[19] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 225.

The Impact of the Social Imagination of "The Human"

on Possibilities for Flourishing

Our collective imaginative conception of "the human" in various social "worlds" often reveals the dominant norms constructing those "worlds"—norms of imagination that have a significant impact on individuals' possibilities for flourishing. Such narrow norms of imagination sometimes even contradict the existence of the variety of identities that inhabit a given social "world." For example, census data show that racial and ethnic "minorities" (i.e. – non-whites) will make up the majority of the U.S. population by 2042.[20] Less than half of all U.S. children will be white by the year 2023.[21] Disturbingly, despite this growing trend, our mainstream cultural discourse continues to rely upon a "default" view of human persons as those who possess dominant social traits (i.e. – white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, etc.).[22] I recall watching news coverage of the 2008 Democratic convention on CNN. While reporting from the convention, the network was flashing up statistics about the percentage of convention delegates who were Native American (2.5%), female (50.1%), LGBT (5.8%), etc.[23] Not once, however, did they cite the percentage of delegates who were white, male, or heterosexual. Despite being the most diverse major party convention in American history, the nature of our cultural discourse still causes CNN to presume that the default viewer, or even more so—the

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[20] "US Census Press Releases," August 14, 2008, http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/population/012496.html.

[21] Ibid.

[22] I do not mean to imply that we should shift our view of what the "default" human being looks like only because of changing demographics. Presumably, for example, the percentage of LGBT-identified persons in the population will not overtake the percentage of heterosexual-identified persons, but this is no reason not to fight against the presumption that the "default" human being is heterosexual.

[23] "Delegate-Diversity-1984-2008.pdf," http://www.demconvention.com/assets/downloads/Delegate-Diversity-1984-2008.pdf Note also that in the statistical breakdown just cited, the categories "male" and "Caucasian" are in fact accounted for, but not the categories "heterosexual" or "non-disabled," even though there are categories for "GLBT" and "delegates with disabilities." These differences in visibility may be revealing in terms of the state of the different cultural discourses surrounding gender and race as opposed to sexual identity and ability.

default human being—is a white heterosexual man.[24] We know this is so because it goes without saying: both literally, insofar as the number of whites, males, and heterosexuals is never explicitly stated, and figuratively, insofar as it is presumed that all people are white, male, and heterosexual *unless otherwise stated*.

This reliance on a narrow idea of the "default" human being shows a particular lack of imagination in our culture at the same time as it reveals the characteristics that we privilege, characteristically presumed to attach to everyone (although in fact they do not). These can function, in effect, as norms. This trend is not limited to one television news network. The pattern of speech exemplified on CNN during the Democratic convention is replicated many times a day, in all manner of media outlets (print, television, internet), regardless of political affiliation. (There is no notable difference in this discourse—though there may be a difference in the numbers—between the Left and the Right). It is exemplified in myriad other actions, expressions, and policies.

The continued silence that prevents us from naming white people as having a race, men as having a gender, and heterosexuals as having a sexual identity, reinforces the notion that race, gender, and sexual identity are differences from the (white, male, heterosexual) norm.[25] That is, identity characteristics like gender, sexual identity, and race only become socially significant markers as deviations from the norm. Naming these traits as a matter of course, as characteristics that attach to *all* human beings, will help to remedy the problem that whites often fail to think of themselves as having a race,

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[24] This point about the "default" human being has been analyzed and described in feminist theory for many years now, but I think it is useful to revisit the basic idea here. Also note that the picture of the "default" human being will vary with respect to the cultural and social context—i.e. in Uganda, for example, the "default" human being is likely not white.

[25] Here again we see the reemergence of the harms that can be inflected by an overly narrow norm—where normativity is used in Butler's second sense. (See Chapter 1, p. 19-20.)

men a gender, and heterosexuals a sexual identity. Eliminating this pattern of thinking—and changing our collective cultural imagination—is especially important if we want to attack the root of the argument that calls rights for oppressed identity groups (e.g. civil rights, women's rights, LGBT rights) "special rights." Organizing on the basis of the (admittedly completely legitimate) interests of these identity groups unfortunately makes such movements vulnerable to rhetorical accusations of "special rights."

The accusation of "special rights" is the unavoidable flip-side of movements based on identity politics. Because social traits that attach to most identity-based movements are seen as *different* from the norm, individuals and communities who are resistant to seeing the oppression of such groups as an issue of fundamental rights interpret such differences—and the way that they are highlighted through identity-based movements—as "special" or outside the norm. Hence, because the claimed needs or rights flowing from those identity categories differ from the assumed rights and needs of the "default" human being (who is white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, etc.), these claims are interpreted as demanding something "extra" because it is *in addition to* (i.e. – different from) that norm. One of the substantial benefits of re-organizing on the basis of human solidarity in a global context is that the inherent diversity of such a movement is immune to the "special rights" rhetoric.

The particular example of the growing ethnic and racial diversity of American society and the concomitant failure of our mainstream cultural discourse to adapt to that reality exemplify a larger point: our conception of what it means to be human—what human beings look like, what language they speak, in what ways they relate to one another, whom they love—fails, continually, to live up to and reflect the true diversity of

human lives. The practice of ethical solidarity aims to rectify this failure. As I argued in Chapter 2, solidary allies should aim to develop a "traitorous" character with regard to such norms, learn from those who are marginalized and "outsiders-within," become aware of unearned privileges, and actively oppose the system that unjustly distributes that privilege.

I want to suggest that the transformation of our imaginative conception of the human has the potential to make a strong impact on problems of dehumanization and stereotyping. As Marilyn Frye has noted, our internal *expectations* of others deeply affects our actual *perceptions* of those others: "*How one sees another* and how one expects the other to behave are in tight interdependence, and how one expects another to behave is a large factor in *determining how the other does behave*."[26] Frye lists examples of empirical studies that show this to be true: experiments in which subjects rated the attractiveness of men's faces in correspondence with how they were told that *others* tended to rate them, and experiments in which the rats of experimenters who were *told* that their rats were bred for high intelligence learn faster than those where the experimenters were told they were bred for low intelligence. We know that these same sorts of relationships between expectation/perception/reality hold true in the case of what is called "stereotype threat"—the risk of confirming negative stereotypes about one's social group when one is reminded of one's membership in that group. These studies suggest that our imaginative conception of others is critically important in determining our expectations for those others, and hence in determining the real possibilities for the flourishing or deterioration of others' lives.

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[26] Frye, *Politics Of Reality - Essays In Feminist Theory*, 67, emphasis mine.

I propose now a framework for conducting our practice of ethical solidarity that will guide the imaginative conception of "the human" for solidary allies—a framework I am calling "queer humanism." Individuals and communities who practice ethical solidarity with the intent of humanizing others must seek to expand and enrich the conception of "humanity" that they implicitly refer others to in their own imaginations. "Queer humanism" approaches this imaginative conception through the concrete multiplication of visions of human lives—accessed via "world"-traveling—rather than essentializing abstractions.

Queer Humanism: In Defense of "The Human"

The overarching project for solidary allies should be loyalty to a notion of "the human" that is grounded in the intellectual framework of "queer humanism." That is, our notion of solidary work should be configured so that we think of ourselves as loyal to humanity and traitorous of limiting and oppressive systems, discourses, and practices. The notion of "the human" that solidary allies support must be one developed through the pluralization and multiplication of concrete understandings of human lives. I again draw upon the insightful work of María Lugones to develop my account of a "queer humanist" conception of "the human."

Queer Humanism: Retaining "The Human"

Lugones advocates a politics of *mestizaje* (or multiple, liminal identity) that insists on the non-contradiction of multiplicity within identity—that is, an identity that is "intelligible" as a whole without being fragmented along the lines of traditional identity

politics categories. Lugones insists on the reality and the making-visible of what she calls "thick" members of social groups, as opposed to those who are "transparent:"

> Individuals are thick if they are aware of their otherness in the group, of their needs, interests, ways, being relegated to the margins in the politics of intragroup contestation. So, as transparent, one becomes unaware of one's own difference from other members of the group. … Thick members are erased. Thick members of several oppressed groups become composites of the transparent members of those groups.[27]

The intellectual, imaginative, and theoretical framework of identity politics separates the different social characteristics of individuals into independent fragments and constitutes those fragments as internally homogenous groups. Thus, one is Mexican/American or Black Lesbian in such a way that the two labels are joined, stuck together, but not integrated. This fracture of identity resonates on personal and political levels. Lugones' point about the invisibility of "thick" members of groups is, on my view, a direct challenge to the viability of even intersectional analyses of identity politics, since "intersectional" still operates under the framework of fragmentation, which supports what Lugones calls a "politics of purity."

The ability to recognize the "thickness" of individuals is a critical skill for solidary allies. This multiplicity of identities *within* a social category is of crucial relevance for dialogues amongst intra-group members. To take one prominent example, the refusal or inability of members of the group "feminist" to recognize "thick" members of the social category "women" has led to the abandonment of the feminist movement by some women of color and transgender women. Rather than having a unified women's movement that acknowledges, values, and respects the internal multiplicity of the members of the group "women," we now have a proliferation of distinct (and, in

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[27] Maria Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 140.

Lugones' terminology, "pure") identity-groups such as "feminist" (read as by and for white women) and "womanist" (read as by and for African American women). On my view, these multiple identity-groups would be well served by the effort to maintain a sense of commonality that unites the feminist movement *as* a movement of diverse kinds of women. Such multiplications have resonance for a queer humanist approach to "the human" insofar as solidary allies attempt to comprehend and embrace the "thickness" *within* "the human," rather than fracturing the concept itself.

Lugones argues, "Liberatory work that makes vivid that oppressions must be fought as interlocked is consistently blocked in oppressed groups through the marginalization of thick members. … But groups in a genuinely heterogeneous society have complex, nonfragmented persons as members; that is, they are heterogenous themselves."[28] In other words, groups that identify themselves on the basis of a shared characteristic are nevertheless internally diverse with regard to the range of expressions of that identity. The temptation to forget or ignore internal diversity within such groups collaborates with the harmful normative forces that block certain individuals from achieving socially "intelligible" identities. Therefore solidary allies must consistently practice breaking down the stereotypical assumptions that we carry within us—assumptions that members of social categories are "transparent" with respect to the category—in order to open up the cultural and social space for the flourishing of diverse human lives.

Clearly, the danger of such an approach is that the notion of "loyalty to humanity" is too abstract to motivate meaningful change or sympathetic feeling.[29] On the contrary,

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[28] Ibid., 141.
[29] This is Rorty's position. See Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, xvi.

queer humanism, rather than *evacuating* the notion of "the human" of any concrete specificity, *fills it up*, to the point of overflowing, with concrete understandings of the variety and multiplicity of potential human lives and experiences.[30] The effect of this multiplication of meanings of the human will be to displace more narrow and buried norms of the human, and this displacement should be permanent because the overflowing of concrete understandings of "the human" is always an ongoing process. The ultimate endeavor of a queer humanist framework is to create a new ethos of citizenship, where solidarity depends not just on abstract claims of human rights and needs, but more so on the *imaginative understanding* of the diversity and variety of human lives—reflected in feeling, action, and politics. This imaginative understanding must be able to accommodate a vision of "thick" members of various social groups as well as working against norms of social "worlds" that significantly constrain diverse possibilities for livable lives for all.

An increased understanding of the multitude of human experiences and the shapes of human lives will not only benefit the work of individual solidary allies, but also the work of the many institutions that share the responsibility for promoting human capabilities (per Nussbaum) and creating livable lives for all (per Butler).[31] Basic assumptions about what are the most significant human needs and human rights must necessarily derive from some imaginative conception of the human.[32] These assumptions become problematic, as many have noted, when they are made on the basis of too narrow

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[30] My call for more concrete descriptions of human life echoes certain aspects of Rorty's position. We differ, however, with regard to the range of approaches available for developing these descriptions. I also argue that it is possible to express solidarity with humanity *as such*, without constructing us/them binaries—a possibility Rorty fundamentally rejects.

[31] See Chapter 1.

[32] When I say "imaginative conception," I do not mean that our conception of the human is "imaginary" as in "made up." Rather, I refer to the sum of images, experiences, cultural messages, and collective and individual visions of what the "default" human life looks like.

an understanding of what human lives look like.[33] Some theorists have taken this problem to mean that we ought to jettison the notion of "the human" or the "self" altogether. But I argue that a better approach to the problem—more successful for the goals of ethical solidarity—is to increase our concrete understandings of what "the human" looks like. Queer humanism is grounded in a conception of humanity that recognizes and affirms the intrinsic diversity of human lives and experience.

The phrase "queer humanism" may seem oxymoronic to some: many prominent scholars of queer theory explicitly mobilize or claim an anti-humanist critique.[34] "Postmodern" theorists like Butler often worry that currently circulating notions of humanism operate with overly narrow norms defining who counts as human. Indeed, I agree with this point. Others worry that any given articulation of "the human" inevitably imports non-universal, culturally inflected assumptions about what is most fundamental to human being. This also seems a true claim. Because of these concerns, many theorists—particularly queer theorists—shy away from leveraging "the human" and humanism for their political arguments, turning instead (often) to the concept of "freedom." As I have argued, however, "freedom" or "tolerance" are lesser substitutes for a sustained, solidary engagement with diverse others to produce the conditions for diverse possibilities for flourishing for all. Furthermore, I think there is an important leverage attached to the concept of "the human" and shared humanity that is irreplaceable by any other term.

On my view, the impulse to reject humanism altogether—because of the harms imposed by a narrow normative conception of "the human" in the past—is to throw out

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[33] See my discussion of Martha Nussbaum's work in Chapter 1.
[34] Judith Halberstam made this claim during a graduate seminar I attended at Emory University in Fall 2007.

the baby with the bath water. Humanism need not *necessarily* perpetuate a narrow normative notion of the human, particularly when viewed (as I will propose) as a concept that is constantly undergoing a process of collective revision and expansion. Martha Nussbaum, for example, mobilizes a humanist framework in her work on the capabilities approach, self-consciously acknowledging and combating the troubled history of humanism in its incarnation in social contract theories. [35]

For rhetorical reasons alone, we would need to hold onto the concept of "the human" in order to keep it from being a tool solely used by those who wield it in an overly narrow normative sense. But rhetoric connects to ethics and politics: our understanding and deployment of "the human" has material effects on the quality of life of those who are not included under the term. Dehumanization, in both subtle and blatant forms, diminishes the social recognition of the population targeted as non- or sub-human and makes it easier to oppress and abuse them. [36] A social practice that humanizes others, then—the practice of ethical solidarity, a practice which re-animates "the human" in new, innovative ways—is a powerful means of fighting back against the evils of dehumanization. This requires retaining the language of "the human" to be mobilized as a strong force for empathy, and queer humanism provides that conception.

An alternative approach to retaining some notion of humanism might be to argue that it is more appropriate to theorize a category of the "posthuman" or to argue that we are now living in a "posthuman" condition. This terminology is often used with

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[35] See Chapter 1. I do not claim that Nussbaum successfully avoids using a narrow normative notion of the human, but her notion is certainly much broader than the theorists' that she criticizes, and seems to me a step in the right direction. Her conception of the human is still lacking in important ways, however, due to her insistence on the separation of private from public goods.

[36] For an example of the impact of language use on the conceptual dehumanization of others and its ramifications for those others, see Phillip Atiba Goff et al., "Not Yet Human: Implicit Knowledge, Historical Dehumanization, and Contemporary Consequences," *Journal of Personality* 94, no. 2 (2008): 292-306.

reference to advancements in technology and therefore with reference to the possibility of human/cyborg beings. I reject the notion of "posthumanism" for generally the same reasons that I reject the notion that we are "postfeminist," or could be anytime soon: the work that plain old humanism and feminism have set themselves to do is as yet incomplete, and those terms are needed to bring the work to fruition. Even Donna Haraway, a prominent feminist cyborg theorist often cited as engaged in postmodern work, agrees with this point. [37]

Queer Humanism: Leveraging "Queer"

Instead, I want to link the term "humanism" with the term "queer" because I see them as creating a productive tension with one another. This is a tension that can address the concerns of critics of traditional humanism while preserving the fulcrum of "the human" for ethical and political work. The use of the term "queer" that I have in mind here connotes a framework that is anti-normative, in the sense of resisting dominant modes of being. Queer theorists such as David Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Muñoz explain that the term "queer" is not fixed or complete in its meaning. Instead, "the operations of queer critique … can neither be decided on in advance nor be depended on in the future. The reinvention of the term is contingent on its potential obsolescence, one necessarily at odds with any fortification of its critical reach in advance or any static notion of its presumed audience and participants."[38] Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz want

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[37] Donna J. Haraway, "Encounters with Companion Species: Entangling Dogs, Baboons, Philosophers, and Biologists," *Configurations* 14, no. 1 (2008): 99. "I never wanted to be posthuman, or posthumanist, any more than I wanted to be postfeminist. For one thing, there is still urgent work to be done in reference to those who must inhabit the troubled categories of woman and human, properly pluralized, reformulated, and brought into constitutive intersection with other asymmetrical differences."

[38] David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?," *Social Text* 23, no. 3/4 (Fall 2005): 3.

to resist the collapsing of the term "queer" back into "lesbian and gay," particularly as "gay" connotes (in the imagination) gay white males.[39] That is, like Lugones' insistence on retaining a "thick" notion of the identities within particular identity groups, Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz want to preserve the diversity of identities and individuals denoted by the term "queer." In coining the term "queer humanism," I want to echo this deployment of "queer" insofar as we might take the concept of "the human" as a *telos* which always awaits us in the future and which displaces a stable resolution of the term.

I argue that the internal tension present in the words "queer humanism" ought to be embraced, since it serves as an important reminder that the concept of "the human" must remain a perennially open question—a question whose answer is indefinitely deferred. "The human" is a *telos* which is never fully defined; it is articulated *within* imaginative social practice, not *prior to* social and political practice. Butler's view of the revisability of "the human" supports this notion of *the human as telos* and links it to Nussbaum's concerns about the discourse of human rights in the international political community: "the necessity of keeping our notion of the 'human' open to a future articulation is essential to the project of a critical international human rights discourse and politics."[40]

As I have argued in Chapter 1, the concerns of scholars promulgating international human rights and the concerns of scholars interested in the less "obvious" harms of normativity converge around the issue of who counts as human. My advocacy of ethical solidarity as a humanizing social practice attempts to acknowledge the

[39] Ibid., 12.
[40] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 222.

necessity of a bright baseline for human flourishing, where the failure to meet that baseline represents a grave injustice against humanity.

Yet the framework of queer humanism also attempts to acknowledge that what it means to be human—or to have a flourishing, livable life—is not forever fixed and that the many bodily manifestations, interpersonal relations, and life-choices of human beings are beyond easy summary. Judith Butler writes, "International human rights is always in the process of subjecting the human to redefinition and renegotiation. It mobilizes the human in the service of rights, but also rewrites the human and rearticulates the human when it comes up against the cultural limits of its working conception of the human, as it does and must."[41] It is our "working conception of the human" that I suggest should be delineated by queer humanism—a conception that is filled with a multiplicity of concrete understandings of the variety of potential human lives and experiences. We access these multiple, concrete understanding of the shapes of human lives through the practice of "world"-traveling, as I have elaborated in Chapter 2. Concrete and diverse images of human lives may be gained by exposing oneself to narratives (e.g. - in books or films), people, social situations, languages, cultures, geographies, or even works of art that presuppose and represent a "world" and the people at home in it which is different from one's own familiar "world" and its inhabitants.

There are compelling reasons for advocating an understanding of human lives through the framework of queer humanism. As I argued in Chapter 2, insights from feminist epistemology have taught us that the way that we view the world is a crucial component of ethical action and relationships. When we think of other people, we must take into account not only our *own* experiences and outlook on life; we must also have in

[41] Ibid., 33.

mind a significant variety of other lives and the needs that arise for those others as they navigate the world. As I argued in Chapter 3, our failures to expand our epistemological horizons result in the creation of social "worlds" that inhibit or obstruct altogether possibilities for flourishing lives for those who do not fit the norm.[42] It does not require malevolence for an individual to have an adverse effect on others' possibilities for flourishing; all that is required is a sufficiently myopic epistemic standpoint. The way that we *think about* and seek to learn more about the people around us and what they are like can have a huge impact on how well we take into account the needs of diverse others in our everyday actions. Therefore, it is clear that our imaginative conception of the human has a *direct impact* on the possibilities for flourishing, livable lives for others.

Another advantage to using a queer humanist framework is that it offers a potentially fruitful way to disrupt or avoid harmful binaries. Particularly because it aims to detach the implicit default characteristics from the collective imaginative conception of the human (male, white, heterosexual, able-bodied, etc.), a queer humanist framework pluralizes and multiplies the characteristics of "the human" in a way that defies any easy reversion to binarism. The power of a device that resists binarism in this way should be particularly compelling for theorists concerned with the *spectrum* of human variation, with reference, for example, to gender, sex, or ability. While I recognize that holding up the notion of the human risks instituting a binary between human and non-human beings,

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[42] To take a very literal example regarding how others navigate the world, a recent article in the *Guardian* notes that British cities continue to be designed for the bodies and needs of men, despite equity planning regulations put in place in 2007. (Viv Groskop, "Sex and the city," *The Guardian*, September 19, 2008, sec. Comment & features) The article suggests that the reasons for these women-unfriendly designs are that the people sitting behind the desks who draw up the plans continue to be mostly men, who therefore see *themselves* in the environments they design. "[The planners] didn't understand how a 15mm lip on a kerb could upset a buggy or a wheelchair. Not that they were being sexist - *it just didn't occur to them*." These sorts of findings reinforce the need for a transformation in the way that individuals think about other people and the world around them on a daily basis.

I want to resist the presumption of arrogance or species-superiority that underlies that notion of humanism, and I hope the modifying work of "queer" helps me to do so.

As Marilyn Frye has noted, there is a certain conception of humanism that views humanity as unique because human beings are deemed a species placed *above* all other beings on Earth. "All human beings can, we assume, be absolutely confident of their unquestionable superiority over every creature of every other species, however clever, willful, intelligent, or independently capable of survival that creature may be. This set of presumptions might suitably be called *humanism.*"[43] Frye connects this notion of humanism to the idea that women are treated as less-than-persons, since the viewpoint of the "phallist" has confused *Man* and *man*. The concept that certain rights and dignity *intrinsically* attach to human persons is immensely powerful, and Frye's analysis only serves to support this point. Hence, we dare not abandon such a powerful tool into the hands of already dominant groups. If "the human" is ever to denote, in our collective cultural imagination, more than simply "straight white male" (etc.), we must *make* it carry a more diverse set of characteristics. Queer humanism can help us towards this transformation: as the practice and the production of a diverse multiplicity of concrete characteristics, experiences, and lives that fills our imaginative conception of "the human" so that it encompasses more than merely the image of the dominant group. Moreover, an imaginative conception of the human along these lines will disclose, rather than obscure, the proximity of the spectrum of human being to that of non-human animals.

Finally, the significance of retaining a conception of our shared humanity can be understood through an examination of what would happen to us without it. Without

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[43] Frye, *Politics Of Reality - Essays In Feminist Theory*, 43.

appealing to a common humanity, individuals who are in need of help, empathy, altruism, or assistance must appeal instead to something *else* they have in common with others. Such appeals would have to call on the limited solidarity of people who share the same community, culture, race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, politics, experience, or interests. (In other words—identity politics.) Alternatively, an appeal to "freedom" leaves us with no way to set limits or norms of action and policy. In cases where appeals to common features are unavailable or ineffective, because appeals to a common humanity would also be unavailable, the plea for help becomes the plea for *pity*. Martha Nussbaum has discussed the pitfalls of appeals to pity or charity in her critique of social contract theories of justice.[44] Depending on the audience, if such an appeal is not heard as a plea for pity, but as a demand for rights, then (as discussed above) that demand may be seen as a call for "special rights" rather than for the rights that attach to human persons as such. Without a conception of shared humanity, appeals for help collapse into appeals against the current structures of power. We are then left to argue, as Aristotle did, that it is part of *virtue* (not part of justice), to be magnanimous and to give to those who have less. This position is less than ideal insofar as such appeals for assistance must then be made *solely* against *individuals* (as virtuous agents) rather than against institutions and social arrangements of power (as structures which ought to support justice).

Queer humanism allows us to avoid the collapse of matters of justice into matters of charity while combating the harms of a narrow normative conception of the human. Furthermore, its diverse understanding of the shapes of human lives enables us to better support human others in pursuit of their own comprehensive conceptions of the good. Political philosophy has a tradition of trying to delineate conditions under which

[44] See Chapter 1.

individuals are free to pursue their own comprehensive conceptions of the good. Queer humanism, as the intellectual referent for the practice of solidarity, *actively supports* diverse others in their pursuit of a variety of comprehensive conceptions of the good through better understanding and recognition of their basic needs, *without* abandoning the pursuit of diverse goods to a lukewarm embrace of "tolerance."

The Impact of the Imaginative Conception of the Human on Political Theory

The framework of queer humanism and the insights of feminist epistemologies have potentially significant consequences for traditional approaches to political theory, especially philosophical theory. To look at one prominent example, our limited epistemological horizons call into question the viability of John Rawls' theory of justice. There are a number of reasons one should be skeptical of the practicability of Rawls' project as he presents it, many of which are enumerated capably by Martha Nussbaum and which I have touched upon in Chapter 1.[45] The issue I wish to investigate now, however, has to do particularly with the "original position" and Rawls' "veil of ignorance."

Rawls claims that the means to identifying the principles of justice that should govern a well-ordered society, based on a fair system of cooperation, may be determined through the use of a mechanism that he calls the "original position." In the original position, free and equal persons come together to mutually agree upon the first principles of justice that will govern their society. In order that these principles are arrived at in a way that is fair to all, Rawls introduces the innovative notion of a "veil of ignorance."

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[45] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007).

The veil of ignorance prevents the parties to the agreement from knowing their "social position or the particular comprehensive doctrines of the persons they represent. They also do not know persons' race and ethnic group, sex, or various native endowments such as strength and intelligence, all within the normal range."[46] From behind the veil of ignorance, the parties to the agreement negotiate with one another until they arrive at the principles of justice which are acceptable to all.

Rawls' motivation for introducing the veil of ignorance is to eliminate the bargaining advantages produced over time by contingent social and historical circumstances, thereby making the final agreement a fair one untainted by any imbalance of power among the parties.[47] While a noble ideal, the intrinsic problem with the veil of ignorance is that the only way we can make actual, practical use of the original position is by having *real individuals* imaginatively place themselves behind the veil of ignorance. What that means, then, is that the *imaginative capabilities* and the *epistemic horizons* of those actual individuals will *limit* their ability to fully place themselves behind the veil of ignorance.

Rawls assumes that it is in fact possible to hypothetically place oneself behind a veil of ignorance, and from that position take into consideration the many possible outcomes of choosing principles of justice, which will affect people differently depending upon their race, class, gender, sexuality, et cetera. Rawls reasons that *not knowing* what one's race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. actually *are*, or who specifically among those social categories one *represents*, will therefore necessarily cause one to choose fairly because one always faces the chance of "winding up" in any given social category. What

[46] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2001), 15.
[47] Ibid., 16.

feminist epistemologies tell us, as discussed in Chapter 2, is that *no one* is capable of imaginatively removing oneself from the world so fully as Rawls here requires. As Judith Butler has argued, we come into the world always already partly formed by the relations, schemas of power, and language in use around us.[48] In that respect, *there is no such thing* as a person "prior" to her or his race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. Such a generic sense of personhood does not exist for human beings. Furthermore, as I have described with respect to the "epistemic horizon," social situations always partly escape our knowing. Hence it is a delusion to think that one is able to divest oneself of one's particular epistemological standpoint as fully as Rawls requires.

Thus, even a person who is quite earnestly trying to divest her- or himself of all knowledge of these contingent facts in the way that Rawls prescribes—taking into account the variety of consequences of her or his choices for diverse situated others—will be intrinsically limited by the imaginative boundaries of her or his own life-experience. To consider an example: imagine that a middle-class, heterosexual, white American woman who has spent her entire life in a relatively homogenous community of others like her, and who is now a Ph.D. student in philosophy, reads *A Theory of Justice* and attempts to place herself imaginatively in the original position. Given her background and limited life-experiences (despite her extensive education!), she will be in a demonstrably poor position to consider the impact of her choices on the lives of those who are markedly different from herself—those who have not experienced the privileges of whiteness, heterosexuality, and middle-class life in America. If she does not have any prior significant insight into, for example, the lives and experiences of working-class

[48] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1997).

Chicana lesbians, or wealthy gay white men, or heterosexual middle-class Middle-Eastern immigrant women, she will be patently unable to take into account the ways in which her decisions behind the veil of ignorance would actually impact them despite her best attempts and good intentions. Similar limitations will confront any individual in the original position, insofar as it is extremely unlikely to find anyone who has the breadth and depth of experience with diverse others to be able to fully consider all of their interests.

A queer humanist practice of "world"-traveling would go some way towards remedying this problem of ignorance through seeking out experiences and knowledge of diverse forms of human lives. The sustained practice of seeking to learn about the lives of lesbians, gay men, Chicana/o or Middle Eastern cultures, immigrants from various countries, etc. would better prepare someone to consider the variety of consequences impinging upon each of these communities and the individuals constituting them when making decisions about our shared social situation.

Given the inability of anyone to accurately understand and represent the interests of all of the diverse individuals whose needs must be taken into account in the original position, it seems that the only alternative is to peel off the veil and allow parties to the original position to know that they represent certain specific social constituencies. If we do that, however, then it is unclear what role the original position could play in determining the principles of justice, since the loss of the veil of ignorance leaves a collection of concrete situated parties negotiating with one another for their own advantage. In this case we wind up with something more akin to Habermas' discourse ethics. And, as I have argued above, some form of discourse ethics is likely the best

route to negotiating political disagreements among communities that share fundamental values of the human. As a strategy which works from the multiplication of concrete visions of human lives, ethical solidarity guided by a framework of queer humanism seems more likely to produce the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing than the abstracting, universalizing proceduralism advocated by Rawls.

Concrete Multiplicity versus Abstract Universalism

To explore the relationship of the imaginative conception of the human to problematic philosophical frameworks like that of Rawls (particularly in political philosophy), I return to the work of María Lugones. As discussed in Chapter 2, Lugones proposes a potentially revolutionary practice of loving "world"-traveling, which would enable the traveler to see and encounter other (different) individuals without a colonizing, arrogant gaze. I return now to link the possibilities for "world"-traveling to Lugones' conception of how we theoretically and imaginatively *construct* the personhood of others. Lugones' understanding of harmful versus helpful constructions of personhood supports my understanding of the advantages of a queer humanist framework.

As discussed above, Lugones distinguishes two different perspectives in the construction of persons. On the one hand, there is "the politics of purity," which relies on fragmentation along the lines of identity politics. On the other hand, there is a politics of *mestizaje*, which relies on multiplicity and ambiguity in imagining and constructing "thick" identities. The politics of purity participate in the making-invisible of the social characteristics of dominant groups, as discussed above in terms of who we think of as the

"default" human being. According to Lugones, the politics of purity assumes a "view from nowhere," a standpoint from the perspective of the pure rational individual, without race, gender, sexuality, or any other socially-relevant marking. (Such a description sounds, unsurprisingly, eerily like Rawls' original position.) The gesture here is a separation of the rational self away from the rest of the self—embodied, emotional, culturally marked. As feminist theorists have been pointing out for years, *there is no such self or standpoint*. As Lugones puts it, "a passionate, needy, sensuous, and rational subject must be conceived as internally separable, as discretely divided into what makes it one—rationality—and into the confused, worthless remainder—passion, sensuality."[49]

The relationship between such a standpoint and the philosophical framework of political theories like Rawls' should be clear: "The urge to control multiplicity is expressed in modern political theory and ethics in an understanding of reason as reducing multiplicity to unity through abstraction and categorization, from a particular vantage point."[50] That is, the *abstraction* from what it means to be fully human—from a complete, vivid, complex imaginative view of personhood—is, contrary to traditional philosophical belief, *harmful* to our theorizing. (Even Rorty has understood that an abstract notion of "the human" along these lines is useless for the purposes of motivating ethical or political action from the perspective of solidarity.) The position that views the underlying unity of humanity as a unity based on the *abstracted* rational subject is a theoretical position that works against human solidarity. As Nussbaum has argued, it actually *excludes* significant portions of the human population,[51] and as I am arguing, it

[49] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 129.
[50] Ibid., 127-8.
[51] See Chapter 1.

prevents us from having a workable conception of humanity from which to act in solidarity with others.

The utilization of a framework of queer humanism avoids the harms of abstracting down to the "least common denominator" of what unites us as human beings, instead looking for commonalities and shared resonances in the multiplicity and variety of experiences that make human beings what we are in the given historical moment. Because our vision of "the human" can never be complete, we are always engaged in the task of gathering and analyzing information about concrete human lives as they have been and are presently lived, seeking in that vision particular forms of commonality and sociality that resonate with the contemporary human experience. The notion that we might define "the human" as a kind of being whose definition or denotation is historically specific and revisable is also applicable to approaches like Nussbaum's. Gould suggests as much when she proposes that we treat the human capabilities as historically specific and subject to revision.[52] Taking up my suggestion that we understand "the human" as a *telos* which can never be fully realized, the question then remains what sort of *guiding visions* of human community we are to operate with if our imaginative conception of the human has such a strong impact on real possibilities for human flourishing.

Utopian Visions as "Yoga for the Imagination"

When I first proposed the idea of "the human" as *telos* to an academic audience, I suggested that utopian visions could play an important role in helping to expand our imaginative horizons and generate new conceptions of diverse possibilities for livable

[52] Carol C. Gould, *Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 50-74.

lives. Prominent queer theorist Mark D. Jordan suggested to me at that time that such utopian visions might be seen as "yoga for the imagination." I turn now to take up this image of utopian visions as tools which help to stretch, limber, and strengthen our imaginations in support of new and diverse possibilities for human flourishing and livable lives.

Butler writes, "Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise. Fantasy is what establishes the possible in excess of the read; it points, it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home."[53] I want to suggest that the practice of utilizing utopian fantasy in our politics supports the production of new "intelligible" spaces for those whose lives are currently or were formerly "unintelligible" in various social "worlds." Thus, for example, I think that there is a political utility in pushing ourselves to imagine a world in which not only "gay marriages" could be sanctioned and supported, but *all* forms of loving partnership, regardless of the gender, sex, number of partners, or anatomy of the individuals involved. One might be inspired to ask with reference to this vision, for example, what makes state-sanctioned marriages of *any* kind worthy of being separated and valued above other forms of non-state-sanctioned relationship. Utopian fantasies help us not only to establish new and liberating possibilities in excess of the real, but also to calibrate our political strategies towards a more sustainable future.

It helps us, for example, to envision a world in which no person would be discriminated against or fired from their job on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender expression. LGBT individuals whose gender expressions "fit" the norm might not grasp the pressing need for a politics that prioritizes the protection of non-normative

[53] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 216.

gender expressions. Thus, it might seem perfectly reasonable to them to pursue political goals that advance the cause of anti-discrimination laws addressing sexual orientation but not gender expression. However, looking to a utopian vision of the future that accounts for a greater diversity of potential flourishing lives without regard to what might be politically expedient helps to give a greater force to the rationale for pursuing anti-discrimination protection on the basis of gender expression, as well.

Experiments in utopian thinking are also productive insofar as they generate a sense of collective belonging that is able to accommodate and support different and diverse identities, experiences, and lives. In his article, "Queerness as Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism," José Esteban Muñoz connects many of the themes I have been exploring with relation to the open-endedness of conceptualizing "the human" and the open-endedness of the term "queer;" he thinks them together with a consideration of the uses of utopia to combat the harms of pragmatic, liberal queer politics. Muñoz suggests, "the field of utopian possibility is one in which multiple forms of belongings in difference adhere to a belonging in collectivity."[54] This idea of the possibility of belonging to a collective that is capable of successfully negotiating internal difference resonates with Lugones' descriptions of the need to recognize "thick" identities as well as my own suggestion that ethical solidarity is a practice that can mediate between differences of power and traditional identity categories. The practice of generating utopian imaginings of a future world thus supports the practice of ethical solidarity in the contemporary world.

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[54] José Esteban Muñoz, "Queerness as Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism," in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 453.

Muñoz explicitly connects queer utopian imaginings to the conception of "the human" as something which is not fixed or static:

> But queerness in its utopian connotations promises a human that is Not-Yet-Here, thus disrupting any ossified understanding of the human. The point is to stave off a gay and lesbian anti-utopianism which is very much tainted with a polemics of pragmatic rights discourse that in and of itself hamstrings not only politics but also desire. Queerness as a utopian formation is a formation based on an economy of desire and desiring. This desire is always directed at that thing which is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise.[55]

Muñoz's invocation of "desire" as forward-looking recalls my discussion in Chapter 2 of the transformation of values needed for the practice of ethical solidarity. The transformation of consciousness that places the value of securing a minimum of human dignity and flourishing for all people at the heart of one's life is necessarily a forward-looking value, a desire for a future where that value can be fully realized—but is not yet. Thus it requires courage and hope as well as traitorous and ingenious actions. Because, as I argued in Chapters 1 and 2, the *realization* of securing the human capabilities and the conditions for the possibility of human flourishing are beyond any of us individually, but hinge upon the action of all of us collectively in ethical solidarity, the desire to fulfill those conditions must always be oriented to the future as a passionately longed-for realization.

Finally, more even than just an exercise in expanding our epistemological horizons through the yogic exercise of the imagination, utopian imaginings are crucial *in themselves* for sustaining livable lives in the present, in the face of "worlds" that construct certain people or identities as unintelligible. They give relief and energy to burdened individuals—they feed the imagination. Muñoz writes, "The present is not

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[55] Ibid., 457.

enough. It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and 'rational' expectations."[56] Because the present is insufficient for sustaining livable lives for so many, the very imagining of a world that could be otherwise is itself a practice that helps to sustain the lives of those who are otherwise "unintelligible" in their social "worlds." Butler concurs: "I think we should not underestimate what the thought of the possible does for those who experience survival itself as a burning issue."[57]

Queer humanism supports the practice of ethical solidarity through envisioning "the human" as an open-ended, evolving *telos* which is never fully realized. The vision that queer humanism promotes, however, is emphatically a *concrete* multiplicity of visions of potential flourishing human lives. Even in generating utopian visions, the framework of queer humanism insists on vistas that are vivid and detailed, populated by potentially real human beings rather than reduplicating the abstract universalism of failed approaches to human commonality. Again, to quote Muñoz: "Abstract utopias are indeed dead ends, too often vectoring into the escapist disavowal of our current moment." [58]

The practice of ethical solidarity is a virtuous practice that itself requires other virtues in order to achieve its most productive effects—effects which possess enormous potential to support a variety of diverse possibilities for flourishing, livable human lives. Undertaken with the conscientious intent to develop new forms of identification that cross differences in power and experience, ethical solidarity transforms the consciousness of solidary allies at the same time that it transforms the social imaginary—an imaginary that mutually shapes and is shaped by the collectivity of individual imaginations.

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[56] Ibid., 458.
[57] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 217.
[58] Muñoz, "Queerness as Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism," 460.

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