Introduction

Human beings love to fictionalize evil—to terrorize each other with stories of defilement, horror, excruciating pain, and divine retribution. Beneath the surface of bewitchment and half-sick amusement, however, lies the realization that evil is real and that people must find a way to face and overcome it. What we require, Carl Jung suggested, is a morality of evil—a carefully thought out plan by which to manage the evil in ourselves, in others, and in whatever deities we posit.[1] This book is not written from a Jungian perspective, but it is nonetheless an attempt to describe a morality of evil.

One suspects that descriptions of evil and the so-called problem of evil have been thoroughly suffused with male interests and conditioned by masculine experience. This result could hardly have been avoided in a sexist culture, and recognizing the truth of such a claim does not commit us to condemn every male philosopher and theologian who has written on the problem. It suggests, rather, that we may get a clearer view of evil if we take a different standpoint. The standpoint I take here will be that of women; that is, I will attempt to describe evil from the perspective of women's experience.

Two serious questions arise immediately. First, if our initial complaint is that moral philosophy has been written unconsciously from a male standpoint, should we now consciously write from a female standpoint? Isn't this a perverse repetition of error? Second, can there be such a thing as "women's experience"? Doesn't such an attempt risk reducing all women to some stereotypical Woman?

An answer to the first question is that a standpoint morality is not in and of itself an error. Indeed, we might defend the thesis that all actual epistemologies and moralities are created from and represent standpoints. Such an admission does not commit us to relativism, for one standpoint may be better than another,[2] and the recognition of standpoints allows us to consider moving about to get clearer views on all aspects of a problem. The notion that one standpoint may be

better than another, however, implies some standard by which to judge. This is a thorny problem for standpoint epistemologies, particularly when they directly address science and science making, but it is less troublesome in moral theory. The test should be whether the theory uncovers something that will help human beings live less painfully and fearfully, whether it finds ways of life that will give us some relief from that which harms or threatens to harm us—from evil.

The second question cautions us to avoid the traditional error of supposing that all women are sufficiently alike that there can be a universally valid women's standpoint. It is probably true that women's experience reveals more commonalities than men's, because women have for centuries been confined to domestic life. Even so, the idea that only one moral perspective can grow out of this experience is clearly questionable. When I assume a woman's standpoint, I will take the perspective of one who has had responsibility for caring, maintaining, and nurturing, and I will try to work out the logic of a morality from such a perspective. It is clear, however, that my perspective is constrained not only because I identify with all women for whom domestic life has been at least a societal expectation, but also because I am white, an academic, not impoverished, happily married, and so on. If what I argue here can be as well or better argued from another standpoint, each such argument will move us toward a more genuinely constructed universal.

The book begins with a description of traditional views of evil. These, I will argue, are not only male but *masculine* in the sense that they maintain and even glorify traits and opinions that have been genderized in favor of males. It is impossible in a work aimed at developing a female morality of evil to describe fully every view of evil that has influenced our culture. I have chosen those that seem most prominent and familiar. A trained theologian would almost certainly go at the task somewhat differently and with considerably more sophistication, but it is not my purpose to repair faulty theology. Rather, I want to lay out the view that has contributed to continuing strife among human beings and, especially, to the devaluation and distrust of women.

To develop a woman's perspective, it is necessary to locate women's place in the old view. Therefore chapter 2 undertakes an account of women as evil. Surely creatures who have themselves been branded as evil or peculiarly susceptible to evil must develop a special perspective

on evil, especially when they are also, and paradoxically, exalted as possessing a special and natural form of goodness. The paradox is resolved when we realize that the dichotomous view of woman as evil (because of her attraction to matters of the flesh) and good (because of her compassion and nurturing) served as a means of control. Women were taught to think of themselves as good when they lived lives of obedience and service. In chapter 3 I complete the setting for a woman's view by describing this "good" side of women—Coventry Patmore's *Angel in the House* and Hegel's Beautiful Soul.[3] Here we see another set of expectations that many women have internalized and that has affected all of us.

In chapter 4 I reverse the view. Instead of looking at evil through the lens of traditional pronouncements on the problem of evil, we take up the standpoint of women to look directly at evil itself and through what we see there at the old views. In this examination I use a modified phenomenological method. Through the use of examples I attempt to draw out the logic of situations in which we face evil and to probe for the underlying commonalities in our experience with evil. What we will find is a pervasive fear of pain, separation, and helplessness.

Having established a feeling for evil uncolored by theological or philosophical propositions (as nearly as one can consciously accomplish that task), I then examine significant forms of natural, cultural, and moral evil from this alternative perspective. It is impossible, of course, to investigate every candidate for evil in these huge categories, but in each category I choose an important example and attempt to apply the framework constructed from a woman's standpoint. The ultimate test of what we accomplish is whether we can avoid some forms of evil and whether the ways of relating described may lead us to live more serenely and supportively with the elements of evil that we cannot escape entirely.

In the examination of pain, poverty, war, and torture, I place great emphasis on the power and generality of the methods and concepts developed in chapter 4. I certainly do not claim to solve these enormous problems in the chapters devoted to them, but I do hope to argue persuasively for a clear approach to their solution. I also explore briefly the task of educating for a morality of evil. Finally, I consider the possibility of spirituality and what it might mean for men's and women's lives and for the development of a morality of evil.