

Moral Injury and the Ethic of Care: Reframing the Conversation about Differences

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It has been 40 years since John Berger wrote, “Never again will a single story be told as though it’s the only one.” It has been 30 years since *In a Different Voice* recast the conversation about self and morality as a conversation about voice and relationships. It has been 15 years since Arundhati Roy coined the phrase “Love Laws” for the laws that establish “who should be loved. And how. And how much.”¹

Meanwhile, a paradigm shift has been spreading through the human sciences. A growing body of evidence coming from developmental psychology, neurobiology, primatology, and evolutionary anthropology has framed what had been taken as milestones of development in a new light. Rather than signifying healthy forms of maturation, the separation of the self from relationships and the splitting of thought from emotion signal injury or responses to trauma.

The primatologist Frans de Waal has called for “a complete overhaul of assumptions about human nature,” based on the recognition that “empathy is part of our evolution, and not just a recent part, but an innate, age-old capacity.” The evolutionary anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy has observed that the capacity for mutual understanding, for “empathy, mind-reading, and cooperation,” was—and may well be—key to our survival as a species. The neurobiologist Antonio Damasio reports that our nervous system is wired to connect mind and body, thought and emotion. In our bodies and emotions, we pick up the music or the “feeling of what happens,” which then plays in our minds and thoughts. When we separate our thoughts from our emotions, we retain the capacity to solve logical problems but lose the ability to register experience and navigate the human social world.²

This change in the understanding of who we are was sparked initially by listening to women. The paradigm shift began with the recognition that empathy and caring are human strengths. The “different voice” had been heard as “feminine” because emotions and relationships were associated with women and seen as limiting their capacity for rationality and autonomy. But the voice itself sounded different because it joined thought with emotion and the self with relationships, because it was embodied rather than disembodied, located in time and place. What had been considered a problem in women’s development was recast as a problem in the framework of interpretation, “a limitation in the conception of the human condition, an omission of certain truths about life.”³ With the shift in

the framework, the “different voice” is, simply, a human voice. We had been telling a false story about ourselves, falsely gendered and false in its representation of human nature.

Beginning in the 1980s when researchers observed infants not alone but with their mothers, they saw a baby they had not imagined—a baby actively seeking and participating in responsive relationships. From a very early age, practically from birth, human infants scan faces, make eye contact, and engage the attention of others. They register the difference between the experience of relationship—being in touch with another person—and the appearance of relationship, when someone who appears to be relating to them is in fact out of touch. As Daniel Stern wrote, the infant’s world is an “interpersonal world.”⁴

With these observations, questions about development reverse. Rather than asking how do we gain the capacity to care, and how do we learn to take the point of view of the other and overcome the pursuit of self-interest, we are prompted to ask instead: how do we lose the capacity to care, what inhibits our ability to empathize with others and pick up the emotional climate, and how do we fail to register the difference between being in and out of touch? And most painfully, how do we lose the capacity to love?

As humans, we are responsive, relational beings, born with a voice and with the desire to live in relationships, along with the capacity to spot false authority. Within ourselves, we have the requisites both for love and for citizenship in a democratic society. These capacities can be encouraged and developed, but they can also be traumatized or stunted.

The culture wars that began in reaction to the democratic advances of the 1960s and 1970s are fights over the framework. As President Obama said in his campaign for re-election, “[This election] will be a choice between two different paths for America, a choice between two fundamentally different visions of the future.”⁵ Are you on your own, or are we in it together? Are you alone, or are we interdependent? The reality is we are in it together because, as the poet W. H. Auden reminds us,

... no one exists alone
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.⁶

I will begin then with a discussion of moral injury—the shattering of trust that compromises our ability to love. Next, I will present a triptych of research on development showing when and how and why our humanity is at risk and highlighting a capacity for resistance. Finally, I will take up the Love Laws as no small thing and not a private matter. As the battles over the Love Laws make plain, the culture wars are a fight between democracy and patriarchy. The ethic of care in its concern with voice and relationships is the ethic of love and of democratic citizenship. It is also the ethic of resistance to moral injury.

I. Moral Injury

In *Achilles in Vietnam*, Jonathan Shay writes about moral injury. As a psychiatrist working with Vietnam combat veterans, he recognized in their chronic post-traumatic stress disorders a shattering of trust that followed the betrayal of “what’s right,” in a high-stakes situation, where the betrayal was sanctioned by someone in a position of legitimate authority. Shay notes that healing from trauma depends on “communalization of the trauma—being able safely to tell the story to someone who is listening and who can be trusted to retell it truthfully to others in the community.” So, he advises, “before analyzing, before classifying, before thinking, before trying to *do* anything—we should *listen*.”⁷

As an example of moral injury, Shay quotes a veteran who was a member of a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol that killed innocent civilians—“a lot of fishermen and kids”—as the result of an intelligence error. The veteran says,

What got us thoroughly fucking confused is, at that time you turn to the team and you say to the team, “Don’t worry about it. Everything’s fucking fine.” Because that’s what you’re getting from upstairs.

The fucking colonel says, “Don’t worry about it. We’ll take care of it.” Y’know, uh, “We got body count!” “We have body count!” So it starts working on your head.

So you know in your heart it’s wrong, but at the time, here’s your superiors telling you that it’s okay. So, I mean, that’s *okay* then, right? This is part of war. . . .

They wanted to give us a fucking Unit Citation—they fucking maggots. A lot of medals came down from it. The lieutenants got medals, and I know the colonel got his fucking medal. And they would have award ceremonies, y’know, I’d be standing like a fucking jerk and they’d be handing out fucking medals for killing civilians.⁸

“Just listen!” veterans say when telling mental health professionals what they need to know to work with them, meaning take in the story before trying to make sense of it. Because in fact the stories don’t make sense; they are stories about becoming “confused,” where the confusion starts “working on your head,” because you “know in your heart it’s wrong” and you’re told by your superiors it’s “okay.” And it’s not just okay but rewarded with medals of honor. In the words of one veteran, these stories are “sacred stuff.”

All too often, as Shay observes, “our mode of listening deteriorates into intellectual sorting, with the professional grabbing the veterans’ words from the air and sticking them into mental bins.” We assume we know what we’re hearing, that we don’t really have to listen, that we’ve heard it all before. Thus, we “resemble museum-goers whose whole experience consists of mentally saying, ‘That’s cubist! . . . That’s El Greco!’ and who never *see* anything they’ve looked at.” As Shay notes, “listening in this way, *destroys* trust.”⁹

I was struck by Shay’s observations about listening because they so closely parallel the approach I have taken in my research. Listening in a way that creates trust was essential to hearing a “different” voice, meaning a voice that didn’t make sense according to the prevailing categories of interpretation. The mode of

listening was so integral to the process of discovery that my graduate students and I created a Listening Guide to render the approach systematic.¹⁰

But I was startled by the resonances I found in Shay's description of moral injury. In the very different context of studying development, my colleagues and I had also observed a shattering of trust following an experience of betrayal in a situation where the stakes were high and the betrayal was culturally sanctioned. Shay's work led me to identify the betrayal as a betrayal of "what's right" and to see the ethical implications in what I had recognized as trauma, although not of the extremity that Shay encountered.

Speaking of "what's right," Shay notes that

No single English word takes in the whole sweep of a culture's definition of right and wrong: we use terms such as moral order, convention, normative expectations, ethics, and commonly understood social values. The ancient Greek word that Homer used, *themis*, encompasses all these meanings.¹¹

"What's right" is Shay's equivalent of *themis*. His colloquial phrasing captures the sense of an inner moral compass we carry with us, which alerts us when we've lost our way or are doing something we know in our hearts is wrong.

The observation of something akin to moral injury was sparked by the studies with girls that followed *In a Different Voice*.¹² The research illuminated an intersection in girls' lives at adolescence where an inner compass points one way and the highway signs in another. Girls had to throw away or ignore their compasses in order to follow the prescribed route with conviction. In their reluctance to do so, my research team and I saw a resistance that was associated with psychological resiliency. But the intersection itself was marked by confusion because at this juncture in development, the very meaning of "what's right" is shifting. The right way to go is not the right way to go.

This tension between psychological development and cultural adaptation became manifest as a crisis of connection, which articulate girls described. Listening to the outspoken voices of younger girls, Iris, a high school senior, reflected, "If I were to say what I was feeling and thinking, no one would want to be with me, my voice would be too loud," and then added by way of explanation, "But you have to have relationships." To say what she was feeling and thinking would jeopardize her relationships, but not saying what she was feeling and thinking meant she was not present in these so-called relationships. Either way, she would lose connection. What previously had been cast as girls' problems with separation was reframed as a crisis in development, precipitated by what some girls recognized as a false choice—namely a choice between having a voice and having relationships.

At thirteen, Judy describes her experience of an initiation that carries with it the risk losing her mind. Your mind, she says, pointing to her gut, "is associated with your heart and your soul and your internal feeling and your real feelings." Facing the quandary of how to stay in touch with what she knows in her gut and

what is considered knowledge, Judy arrives at a creative solution: she separates her mind not from her body but from her brain, which she locates in her head and associates with her smartness, her intelligence, her education. People, she says,

can control what they're teaching you and say, "This is right and this is wrong." That's control like into your brain. But the feeling is just with you. The feeling can't be changed by someone else who wants it to be this way. It can't be changed by saying, "No, this is wrong, this is right, this is wrong."

Yet, "after a while, you just sort of forget your mind, because everything is being shoved at you into your brain."¹³

Judy is thirteen, a reflective eighth grader, struggling with dissociation and trying to hold on to what she knows. She contends with a voice that carries moral authority—a voice she experiences as intrusive and controlling. You can forget your mind, she says, but the "deeper sort of knowing," the knowing she associates with her heart and her soul and her real thoughts and feelings, can't be changed by someone saying, "No this is wrong, this is right." However forceful the initiation, however linked with smartness, intelligence, and education and all they imply, the "feeling is just with you," a gut knowing, buried perhaps but not lost.

The deeper sort of knowing Judy describes is the knowing implied by people who took great risks under the Nazis: Magda Trocme, the pastor's wife in Le Chambon sur Lignon who responded when Jews knocked on her door by saying, "Come in"; Antonina Zabinska, the zookeeper's wife in occupied Warsaw, who hid over 300 Jews in the zoo in the center of the city; and Jan Zabinski, the zookeeper, who led Jews out of the ghetto under the eyes of the Nazis. When asked how they did what they did, they said that they were human; they did what any person would have done. Interviewed by the Israeli press after Antonina and he were recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among Nations, Jan explained, "It wasn't an act of heroism. Just a simple human obligation."¹⁴

The research on development gives a slightly different slant to Shay's writings about moral injury. It picks up on something the veteran said—he knew in his heart it was wrong. Deep assumptions of what's right and wrong, what's praiseworthy and blameworthy, are rooted not only in culture but also in our humanity. This explains Shay's observation of a consistency in response across cultural differences:

The specific content of the Homeric warriors' *themis* was often quite different from that of American soldiers in Vietnam, but what has not changed in three millennia are violent rage and social withdrawal when deep assumptions of "what's right" are violated.¹⁵

We live in bodies and in culture, but we also have a psyche—a voice and a capacity for resistance. The psyche's response to moral injury across three millennia and different cultures was violent rage and social withdrawal, and also, as Shay describes, going berserk, going crazy, because something had happened that psychologically didn't make sense.

II. A Triptych of Development

The word “betrayal” appears repeatedly in Niobe Way’s book *Deep Secrets*, used by the adolescent boys in her studies to explain why they no longer have a best friend, why they don’t tell their secrets to anyone anymore. Justin describes it as something that “just happens”; he doesn’t know if it’s “natural or whatever.” But the shattering of trust is unmistakable. As Joseph says, “You can’t trust nobody these days.”¹⁶

Something had happened. Justin was among the majority of the boys in Way’s studies—boys from a range of cultural backgrounds (Latino, Puerto-Rican, Dominican, Chinese, African-American, Anglo, Muslim, Russian, and so on)—who “spoke about having and wanting intimate male friendships and then gradually losing these relationships and their trust in their male peers.” As a freshman and sophomore in high school, Mohammed spoke of telling his best friend all his secrets; when interviewed as a junior, he says, “I don’t know. Recently . . . you know I kind of changed something. Not that much, but you know I feel like there’s no need to—I could keep [my feelings] to myself. You know, I’m mature enough.” Fernando echoes his explanation. Asked what he sees as an ideal friendship, he begins, “You gotta be funny, truthful, I just got to have fun with you, you know,” but then he says, more haltingly and with a question, “Um, you gotta, I guess just be there for me? I guess, I don’t wanna sound too sissy-like. . . . I think I’ve matured in certain ways. . . . I know how to be more of a man.”¹⁷

In the early years of high school, the boys resist the gender binary that makes it “sissy-like” to depend on someone and want them to “just be there for me.” But by the end of high school, as Way notes, the binary is enforced. Emotional intimacy and vulnerability have a gender (girly) and a sexuality (gay), and being a man means being emotionally stoic and independent.

Thus, we see the effects of a construction of masculinity where being a man means not being a woman or like a woman and also being on top. What previously felt unimpeded—the “trust, respect, and love” that fifteen-year-old Justin saw as “so deep, it’s within you . . . it’s human nature”¹⁸—has become fraught. Justin doesn’t know if the distance he now feels from his friends is “natural or whatever”; what he knows is it “just happens.”

The boys in Way’s studies know the value of close friendships. George says that without a best friend to tell your secrets to, you would “go whacko.” Chen says that without a close friend, “you go crazy.” Others describe how anger builds up inside them when they don’t have a best friend to talk to. Some speak of sadness, loneliness, and depression. Yet in spite of this awareness, they minimize the loss and downplay its consequences, chalking it up to maturing or knowing “how to be more of a man.”

The research with girls, the center panel of the triptych, illuminates the mechanism of betrayal by showing how it is enacted through separations that create rifts in the psyche. The head is divided from the heart, the mind from the body, and the embodied voice, the voice that carries “the feeling of what happens,”

is separated from relationships. At sixteen, Neeti reflects, “The voice that stands up for what I believe in has been buried deep inside me.”¹⁹ A voice with integrity resides within her, but its silence compromises her relationships and limits her ability to participate as a citizen in a democratic society.

Articulate girls such as Judy and Neeti describe their strategies of resistance—separating your mind from your education, taking an honest voice underground. When it becomes seemingly impossible to have a voice and also to have relationships, some form of psychic splitting is inescapable. “I don’t know,” girls say; “I don’t care,” boys say. Yet the research shows that girls do know and boys do care, although they may need not to know or to show this.

The internalization of the gender binary and hierarchy marks the psyche’s induction into a patriarchal order. Whenever you hear a gender binary—being a man means not being a woman or like a woman (and vice versa)—and encounter a gender hierarchy that privileges the masculine (reason and self) over the feminine (emotions and relationships), you know you are in patriarchy, whatever it may be called. Organized around gender and privileging the voices of fathers, patriarchy is at odds with democracy, which rests on a presumption of equal voice or equality. But it is also in conflict with human nature. By splitting human qualities into “masculine” or “feminine,” the gender binary forces dissociation, and the hierarchy undermines trust. Thus, the initiation entails a betrayal of what’s right by shattering the ability to live with integrity in connection with others. The stakes are high—identity and inclusion are on the line—and the betrayal is enforced by shaming and rewarded with the equivalent of medals of honor: Iris, who doesn’t say what she is thinking and feeling, is the valedictorian of her high school class and has been admitted to the competitive college that is her first choice.

To appreciate what is lost and also why, one has only to listen to girls before the initiation sets in. In a discussion of whether it is ever good to tell a lie, eleven-year-old Elise, a sixth grader in an urban public school, says, “My house is wallpapered with lies.” Elise’s voice is the voice of countless preadolescent girls in novels written across time and cultures. At the beginning of *Jane Eyre*, Jane, age ten, tells her Aunt Reed: “You said I was a liar. I’m not. If I were I’d have said I loved you, and I don’t. . . . People think you are good, but you are bad, and hard-hearted. I will let everyone know what you have done.” It’s the voice of Iphigenia in Euripides’s tragedy, of Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, of Frankie in *The Member of the Wedding*, Rahel in *The God of Small Things*, Claudia in *The Bluest Eye*, Tambu in *Nervous Conditions*, Annie John, the list is endless. We know this voice, and yet it’s hard not to hear it as girls themselves will come to hear it—as “rude” or “stupid,” “unpleasant,” and “insufferable”—the last two adjectives are Anne Frank’s.²⁰

The voice is culturally inflected but clearly recognizable. A girl on the threshold of becoming a young woman sees what she is facing and says what she sees. In Charlotte Brontë’s novel, when Aunt Reed tells Jane that “Children must be corrected for their faults,” Jane responds, “Deceit is not my fault.” And that is

precisely the issue. Honest and direct, girls' voices must be corrected or dismissed: otherwise, what they see and say must be addressed. Yet once the correction is made or the voice recedes into silence, few people ask, "Where is that honest voice?"

Millions of readers read Anne Frank's diary without realizing that they were reading not Anne's actual diary but a version of the diary that Anne herself had edited. On Radio Free Orange, broadcasting from London into the Netherlands, she had heard that the Dutch government in exile had plans to set up a war museum after the war and were interested in diaries, letters, and collections of sermons that would show how the Dutch people carried on their lives under the harsh conditions of the war. Anne wanted to be a famous writer, and she seized her chance, rewriting over 300 pages of her diary between May and August of 1944. It was this edited version that most of us read, without missing what Anne had left out: her pleasure in her changing body with its "sweet secrets"; her pleasure with her mother and sister—"Mummy, Margot and I are thick as thieves again"—and her awareness that the stories adults tell children about purity and marriage are "nothing more than eyewash." In correcting her diary, Anne knew what she was doing and why: she wanted her diary to be chosen.²¹

The brilliance of dissociation as a response to trauma is that what is dissociated, split off from consciousness and held out of awareness, is not lost. As the poet Eavan Boland writes, "What we lost is here in this room/On this veiled evening."²² Association—the stream of consciousness and the touch of relationship—can unlock dissociation, bringing what is out of awareness back into consciousness. When it does, we have the sensation of discovering something at once familiar and surprising. Something we know, and yet didn't know that we knew.

In *When Boys Become "Boys,"* Judy Chu brings the eye of a naturalist to a study of four- and five-year-old boys. Observing them as they move from pre-kindergarten through kindergarten and into first grade, she witnesses them becoming "boys." The boys who at four and five had been so articulate, so attentive, so authentic, and direct in their relationships with one another and with her were gradually becoming more inarticulate, inattentive, inauthentic, and indirect with one another and with her. Chu saw evidence of boys' resistance to this initiation in their strategic concealment of their empathy and desire for closeness. Boys' relational capacities are not lost, she writes, "Rather, boys' socialization toward cultural constructions of masculinity that are defined in opposition to femininity seems mainly to force a split between what boys know (e.g. about themselves, their relationships, and their world) and what boys show."²³

Winning the boys' trust, Chu learns about The Mean Team—"a club created by the boys, for the boys, and for the stated purpose of acting against the girls." The Mean Team established a masculinity defined in opposition to and as the opposite of a femininity associated with being good and nice. Thus, the main activity of The Mean Team was, in the words of one of the boys, to "bother people."

Chu observes that the very relational capacities boys learn to shield, the empathy and emotional sensitivity that enable them to read the human world around them so accurately and astutely, are essential if they are to realize the closeness they now seek with other boys. Yet in blunting or concealing these capacities in order to be one of the boys, they render that closeness unattainable.

In the epilogue to *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Man*, the psychoanalyst Donald Moss tells a story about his experience in first grade. Every week the children learned a new song and were told that at the end of the year, they would each have a chance to lead the class in singing their favorite, which they were to keep a secret. For Moss, the choice was clear: “The only song I loved was the lullaby ‘When at night I go to sleep [Fourteen angels watch do keep]’ from *Hansel and Gretel*.” Every night he would sing it to himself, and like the song said, the angels came, saving him from his night terrors and enabling him to fall asleep. It “was, and would always be, the most beautiful song I had ever heard.”²⁴

The first graders had learned the song in early autumn, and in late spring, when Moss’s turn came, he stood in front of the class. The teacher asked what song he had chosen. Moss recalls,

I began to tell her: “it’s the lullaby . . .” But immediately, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the reaction of the boys in the front row. Their faces were lighting up in shock. . . . I knew, knew in a way that was immediate, clear and certain, that what I was about to do, the song I was about to choose, the declaration that I was about to make, represented an enormous, irrevocable error . . . what the boys were teaching me was that I was to know now, *and to always have known*, that “When at night I go to sleep” could not be my favorite song, that a lullaby had no place here, that something else was called for. In a flash, in an act of gratitude, not to my angels but to my boys, I changed my selection. I smiled at the teacher, told her I was just kidding, told her I would now lead the class in singing the “Marines’ Hymn”: “From the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli . . .” (italics added)²⁵

Moss thus remembers the initiation that Chu observes: the “Marines’ Hymn” could well be the song of The Mean Team formed by the boys she studied. As Moss recalls, “There were no words. . . . The boys, the eyes of the boys, took over. . . . The lesson they were teaching me could never be acknowledged. I was never to show that I had needed this lesson.” Writing from the vantage point of middle age, Moss says that his book “can be thought of as an extended effort to unpack that moment in front of the class and indirectly, to apologize to the angels for my treachery.” He had been “unfaithful” to them, had “renounced them in public and continued to do so for many years.” The residue was a melancholia, tied to the boy’s awareness that,

what he is “really” doing in that fateful turning outward is simultaneously preserving and betraying his original love of angels, affirming and denying his new love of boys; after all, now he and the boys are joined together in looking elsewhere for the angels they might have all once had.

Yet in spite of his treachery, the angels “are still there.”²⁶

What Moss shows us with stunning precision is how initiation leads to a re-writing of history: “I was to know now, *and to always have known* . . . that a lullaby could not be my favorite song.” Yet he also reminds us that within ourselves, we know what we once knew and then came not to know: the lullaby “was, and would always be, the most beautiful song I had ever heard.”

III. The Love Laws

In an overlooked passage midway through *Anna Karenina*, we hear the hushed voice of Karenin. “[P]rior to the day when he saw his dying wife, he had not known his own heart.”²⁷ Like Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*, Tolstoy takes us into the territory of the Love Laws—the laws that establish who can be loved, and how, and how much. In Hawthorne’s novel, the word “patriarchy” appears repeatedly—“patriarchal privilege,” “patriarchal personage,” and “patriarchal deacon”—along with a portrait of “the father of the Custom House, the patriarch,” who “had no soul, no heart, no mind.”²⁸ He resembles Karenin, also a government official.

The central characters, Anna Karenina and Hester Prynne, are so dazzling, so vibrant, that our eye fixes on them. They stand out among the “Goodwives,” who are gray and muted by comparison. Anna and Hester break the Love Laws, driven by a “lawless passion.” We want to know what happens to them. It is almost as if they serve as decoys to distract us from what Tolstoy and Hawthorne are showing us about what happens to men in patriarchy. The names of Hawthorne’s central male characters—Dimmesdale and Chillingworth—give us a clue. Yet Hester’s scarlet A so rivets our attention, that we may miss the implied questions: how does a man of worth—Mr. Chillingworth—become chilling; how does a man of nature—Mr. Dimmesdale—become dim?

It’s Tolstoy who takes us to the core. Anna is due to give birth to the child she conceived with her lover Vronsky. Deathly ill, she sends a telegram to her husband, begging him to come and to forgive her so she can die in peace. He assumes it’s a trick and feels only contempt; yet he is concerned that if he didn’t go and she died, it would “not only be cruel—and everybody would condemn me—but it would be stupid on my part.”²⁹ So he went.

Readers often forget or don’t quite take in that at this juncture in the novel, Karenin offers to give Anna both her freedom and her son. He will divorce her and by taking the disgrace upon himself, make it possible for her to go into society and to keep Seryozha with her. As it turns out, Anna does not take the offer. Her decision is unexplained. In a novel where we are told even what the dog thinks, Anna’s refusal to take her freedom, which seals her fate, is told cryptically in a terse, one-sentence paragraph: “A month later Alexei Alexandrovich was left alone in his apartment with his son, and Anna went abroad with Vronsky without obtaining a divorce and resolutely abandoning the idea.”³⁰

We are, however, told in detail what happened to Karenin when, at his wife’s bedside, “he had given himself for the first time in his life to that feeling of tender

compassion which other people's suffering evoked in him, and which he had previously been ashamed of as a bad weakness . . ." He suddenly felt

not only relief from his suffering but also an inner peace that he had never experienced before. He suddenly felt that the very thing that had once been the source of his suffering had become the source of his spiritual joy, that what had seemed insoluble when he condemned, reproached, and hated, became simple and clear when he forgave and loved . . .³¹

Anna doesn't die. Karenin forgives Vronsky; he tells him,

You may trample me in the mud, make me the laughing stock of society, I will not abandon her, I will never say a word of reproach to you. . . . My duty is clearly ordained for me: I must be with her and I will be. If she wishes to see you, I will let you know.³²

Karenin settles into the household and begins to observe the people around him, the wet nurse, the governess, and his son. He regrets that he hadn't paid much attention to Seryozha. Now he "stroked the boy's hair with his hand." For the newborn little girl, "he had some special feeling, not only of pity but also of tenderness—he did not know how he came to love her." He looked after her so she wouldn't die; he "went to the nursery several times a day and sat there for a long while," watching her closely. "He would sometimes spend half an hour silently gazing at the saffron-red, downy, wrinkled cheek of the sleeping baby," and "felt utterly at peace and in harmony with himself, and saw nothing extraordinary in his situation, nothing that needed to be changed."

But. . . .

the more time that passed, the more clearly he saw that, natural as this situation was for him, he would not be allowed to remain in it. He felt that, besides the good spiritual force that had guided his soul, there was another force, crude and equally powerful, if not more so, that guided his life, and that this force would not give him the humble peace he desired. He felt that everybody looked at him with questioning surprise, not understanding him and expecting something from him.³³

Over a stretch of fifteen pages, Tolstoy repeats the phrases crude force, powerful force, and mysterious force—as though to make sure they stay in our mind, like Vronsky's strong, white teeth. In the face of this force, Karenin feels powerless. "He knew beforehand that everything was against him and that he would not be allowed to do what now seemed to him so natural and good, but would be forced to do what was bad but seemed to them the proper thing."³⁴

What seemed to Karenin "natural and good," in the eyes of the world seems bad and improper. The crude, powerful, and mysterious force that "contrary to his inner mood, guided his life, demanding the carrying out of its will"—that had led him to feel ashamed about "that feeling of tender compassion which other people's suffering evoked in him" and to regard it as a "bad weakness"—is patriarchy.

Anna had broken the love laws. But in doing so, she had freed love—her own and as it turns out, also Karenin's. We learn that Karenin had been an orphan, his childhood bleak. His pursuit of status and honor appears in this light as an attempt to fill an inner void. He was a man afraid of feeling, cut off from love, ashamed of his humanity. Until suddenly—also a repeated word in this passage—his heart opens in response to Anna and the baby, an opening he experiences as simple and clear, natural and good.

He writes to Anna, "Tell me yourself what will give you true happiness and peace in your soul." Reversing the patriarchal hierarchy, he says, "I give myself over entirely to your will and your sense of justice."³⁵ In this moment, they appear simply human: he with emotions of tenderness and compassion, she with will and a sense of justice. But the world they live in is ruled by a crude force. Karenin sacrifices his love; Anna sacrifices her will and her desire for freedom.³⁶ And with these sacrifices, the tragedy is inescapable. Once Anna leaves without obtaining a divorce, once she gives up the freedom she wanted and that could have made her life with Vronsky viable, enabling her like him to go out into society and not separating her from her son, it's a straight line to her death under the train.

Love is the force that has the power to upset a patriarchal order. Crossing its boundaries—in Roy's novel an untouchable man touches a touchable woman—it dismantles its hierarchies of race, class, caste, sexuality, and gender. Thus, love must be betrayed or lead to tragedy for patriarchy to continue. Hence the Love Laws, hence the association of patriarchy with trauma and moral injury, because as Tolstoy shows us in the character of Karenin, the betrayal of love is a betrayal of what's right.

The privileged position of men in patriarchy can blind us from seeing what these novelists show us. The resistance that comes from within rather than from someone who stands outside the culture is the resistance of Vronsky, who repeatedly turns down opportunities to rejoin his regiment and rise in the hierarchy, choosing instead to be with Anna. In this respect, he resembles Shakespeare's Antony who, speaking of Egypt and Cleopatra, says, "Let Rome in Tiber melt, here is my place."

Dimmesdale, Hester's lover and the father of Pearl, also is a resister: "by the constitution of his nature, he loved the truth, and loathed the lie, as few men ever did." Living a lie, "he loathed his miserable self!"³⁷ Chillingworth, who is compared with the devil and becomes the embodiment of evil as he preys on Dimmesdale's soul, is also the person who, in the end, leaves all his fortune, which we are told is considerable, to Pearl, thus becoming like a father to her.

Tolstoy and Hawthorne tell a dominant story. They show us the price of freeing love within a patriarchal order, but they also reveal the costs of its containment. In the hushed voices of the men, we hear the signs of moral injury, as they are forced to betray what's right, in a high-stakes situation, a betrayal sanctioned in the eyes of the word as good and proper. Love, Hawthorne writes, "whether newly born, or aroused from a deathlike slumber, must always create sunshine, filling the heart so full of radiance, that it overflows upon the outward

world.” He also observes that “No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true.”³⁸

IV. Reframing the Conversation about Differences

It is difficult in this post-modern age to speak of an honest voice. The recognition of cultural differences complicates the search for moral truth. We find ourselves at something of an impasse as we weigh in the abstract the relative claims of equality versus toleration and debate whether we can uphold the values of individual liberty and religious freedom while maintaining a commitment to human rights. In these discussions, the situation of women repeatedly comes to the fore. Can a democratic society sanction or turn a blind eye to the subordination of women in patriarchy?

One way to move the discussion beyond the old arguments about moral truth versus cultural relativism is to begin by talking about listening—listening in a way that creates rather than destroys trust. Then we can talk about moral injury and the ethic of care that guides us in preventing the betrayal of what’s right. Finally, we can recognize that even within culture, there are voices that resist culture, and although they may be hushed or hidden at the margins, these voices may hold the power to transform the conversation.

With the paradigm shift in the human sciences, we can recognize the extent to which we have mistaken patriarchy for nature and failed to see what the Arab spring demonstrated so viscerally: the desire to have a voice and to live democratically with others is a human desire. In Egypt, the presence of women in Tahrir Square was striking, as was their absence from the proceedings that followed. In the struggle between democracy and patriarchy, women are a weather vane, showing which way the wind is blowing. The Love Laws are a mainstay of patriarchy and we need to fight them, not acquiesce in the separation of “women’s human rights” from human rights or relegate women to a special sphere where equality becomes uncertain and rights don’t apply. Knowing that the private sphere is where women are most at risk, it is unconscionable not to speak out and watch out for their rights and their safety.

Hrdy observes that the patriarchal family is neither traditional nor original in an evolutionary sense. However natural it may appear, however God-given it is said to be, “patriarchal ideologies that focused on the chastity of women and the perpetuation and augmentation of male lineages undercut the long-standing priority of putting children’s well-being first.”³⁹

Care is a feminist, not a “feminine” ethic, and feminism, guided by an ethic of care, is arguably the most radical, in the sense of going to the roots, liberation movement in human history. Released from the gender binary and hierarchy, feminism is neither a women’s issue nor a battle between women and men. It is the movement to free democracy from patriarchy.

The Laguna Pueblo poet and scholar Paula Gunn Allen writes, “the root of oppression is the loss of memory.”⁴⁰ The moral injury patriarchy inflicts on women and men leads to a loss of memory and a rewriting of history. So we forget what we know. Patriarchy is an order of domination elevating some men over other men and all men over women. It has been given both moral and religious sanction; honor and goodness are bestowed in exchange for the sacrifice of love and voice. Patriarchy implants itself into the psyche by attaching itself to gender, so that becoming a man or a woman, a real man or a good woman, means internalizing its binary and hierarchy. But the psyche resists this implantation.

In a Different Voice highlighted the pivot in women’s development that follows a woman’s realization that selflessness, long seen as the epitome of feminine goodness, is in fact morally problematic. It signifies an abdication of voice and thus an evasion of responsibility and relationship. My interviews with pregnant women who were considering abortion took place in the immediate aftermath of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*. When the highest court in the land gave women a legitimate voice in deciding whether to continue or abort a pregnancy, it encouraged women to scrutinize the sacrifice of voice in the name of goodness. Janet, one of the women in *In a Different Voice*, articulates the shift in her thinking when her concerns about goodness become joined by a concern about truth. You have to know what you’re doing, she says; you have to be “truthful, not hiding anything, bringing out all the feelings involved,” before you can know if it is “a good decision and an honest one, a real decision.” Claiming agency, she claims responsibility. She counters the accusation of selfishness that had led her to silence herself by committing herself to truth. Her decision will be “a real decision.”⁴¹

A comparable pivot in men’s development occurs when a man recognizes that he has been living a lie and scrutinizes his betrayal of love. Apologizing to his angels for his treachery, Donald Moss reflects that he had been unfaithful to them, had “renounced them in public and continued to do so for many years.” But he also had been unfaithful to himself because in truth the lullaby was his favorite song.

In “*Are You Not a Man of God?*” *Devotion, Betrayal, and Social Criticism in Jewish Tradition*, Tova Hartman and Charlie Buckholtz focus on the resistance that arises within a tradition—that arises in part out of devotion to the tradition.⁴² Their point is that social criticism does not have to come from outside. Focusing on stories about people *in* relationship to people in positions of power, they take the vantage point of these supporting characters as their lens for reading traditional stories. They observe that the tradition itself preserves these resisting voices, although they are often hushed or veiled and placed at the margins. The supporting characters argue with their fathers, with their husbands, mothers, brothers, and friends. They encounter people with whom they have close relationships—usually people in power who are meant to embody the highest cultural values—in the act of transgressing these very values.

Thus, we see within traditions the same tensions we associate with cultural differences. In a passage resonant with Shay, Hartman and Buckholtz observe that

the reactions of supporting characters “to the trauma of these bewildering transgressions tend to be visceral and vivid.”

The sudden forced awareness of deep moral fissures in their friends, family, and cultural-meaning networks is often presented as a jarring contradiction to their deepest held understandings—value assumptions that have become so thoroughly assimilated that they are barely if at all distinguishable from the self.

These “identity-shattering explosions detonated at the margins of traditional narratives” lead supporting characters to resist those in power, even as they hold on devotedly to their relationships to those they resist. Hartman and Buckholtz find it intriguing that “the carriers of culture, the shapers of canon, deemed this a type of resistance—resistance, we might say, through the medium of relationship—worthy of holding onto.”

The shocking betrayals are betrayals of love. Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia to restore Greek honor; Abraham prepares to sacrifice Isaac to prove his devotion to God. Their acts are culturally sanctioned and rewarded with honor. In Euripides’s tragedy, Iphigenia tells her father that he is mad and challenges the culture that privileges honor over life. In the Bible, Isaac has no voice, but the writers of the Midrashic canon of Biblical commentaries—asking in effect, where is his voice?—give him a voice. He both accedes to and pushes back against his father’s decision, saying “But I grieve for my mother.”

The bewildering nature of these betrayals comes not only from their violation of the culture’s *themis*, but also from their rupture of experience. Up to this point, Iphigenia and Isaac experienced their fathers’ love; they experienced their fathers as in relationship with them. In Euripides’s tragedy, Iphigenia reminds Agamemnon of the words he said to her, the love and closeness they shared. But suddenly, it is as though these words and actions have no meaning. The betrayal violates deep assumptions of what’s right. It is viscerally shocking because it shakes the very ground of experience, undermining our ability to trust what we know.

The ethic of care guides us in acting carefully in the human world and highlights the costs of carelessness. It is grounded less in moral precepts than in psychological wisdom, underscoring the costs of not paying attention, not listening, being absent rather than present, not responding with integrity and respect. In the documentary film *The Gatekeepers*, six former heads of Shin Bet, Israel’s internal security service, are interviewed about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In the end, these hardened and tough-minded men see only one solution: talking with one’s enemies. “I’d talk with anyone,” the eldest says, even Ahmadinejad. He isn’t speaking about negotiating peace but something more elemental. He is talking about revealing a common humanity: “I see you don’t eat glass. He sees I don’t drink petrol.”⁴³

I have told multiple stories, interweaving the diverse voices of combat veterans, girls and women, boys and men, Hawthorne and Karenin. The tensions

between cultures play out within cultures and also within ourselves. To paraphrase John Berger, never again will a single voice be heard as the only one. If we are serious about recognizing and respecting differences, then we need to hear and encourage the full range of voices within and around us by becoming a society of listeners. Active listening means asking, how might I call forth a voice that is held in silence, a voice under political or religious or psychological constraint? How can I listen in women for the honest and perceptive voice of the eleven-year-old girl, or in men for the emotionally open and intelligent voice of the four-year-old boy? What are the associations that bring dissociated experiences back into awareness? Like love, art has the power to cross boundaries and open doors that have seemingly been nailed shut. What happens when we replace judgment with curiosity? Rather than putting ourselves in the shoes of the other, we would do better to put on our shoes and go to the other to learn from them about their place.

I conclude with Jonathan Shay: "If we want to live among equals with strength and candor, among people with, as Euripides says 'free and generous eyes,' the understanding of trauma can form a solid basis for a science of human rights." As Shay says, "The vision of a good life for a human being is an ethical choice and cannot be coerced. It can only be called forth by persuasion, education, and welcoming appeal."⁴⁴

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Notes

¹ John Berger, *G: A Novel* (London: Bloomsbury, 1972), 133; Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), 311.

² Frans de Waal, *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society* (New York: Harmony Books, 2009), 7, 205; Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994); and Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1999).

³ Gilligan, *Voice*, 2.

⁴ Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (New York: Basic Books, 1998). See also Lynn Murray and Colwyn Trevarthan, "The Infant's Role in Mother-Infant Communication," *Journal of Child Language* 13 (1986): 15–29; Edward Tronick, "Emotions and Emotional Communication in Infants," *American Psychologist* 44, no. 2 (1989): 112–9; and Hrdy, *Mothers*.

⁵ Barack Obama, Speech at the Democratic National Convention, September 6, 2012.

⁶ W. H. Auden, "September 1, 1939," *Another Time* (New York: Random House, 1940).

⁷ Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Scribner, 1994), 4.

⁸ Ibid., 3–4.

⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰ See Carol Gilligan, Renee Spencer, Katherine Weingarten, and Tatiana Bertsch, “On the *Listening Guide*: A Voice-Centered, Relational Method,” in *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Expanding Perspectives in Methodology and Design*, ed. Paul Camic, Jean Rhodes, and Lucy Yardley (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003), 157–72.

¹¹ Shay, *Achilles*, 5.

¹² See Carol Gilligan, “Joining the Resistance: Psychology, Politics, Girls and Women,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 34, no. 4 (1990): 501–36; Carol Gilligan, Nona Lyons, and Trudy Hanmer, ed., *Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Carol Gilligan, Annie Rogers, and Deborah Tolman, ed., *Women, Girls, and Psychotherapy: Reframing Resistance* (New York: Haworth Press, 1991); Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan, *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Jill Taylor, Carol Gilligan, and Amy Sullivan, *Between Voice and Silence: Women and Girls, Race and Relationships* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹³ Carol Gilligan, *Joining the Resistance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 64–67. For an extended discussion of Judy, see Brown and Gilligan, *Meeting*, 123–141.

¹⁴ See Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); Diane Ackerman, *The Zookeeper’s Wife: A War Story* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007); Aviva Lori, “Code Name: Fox,” *Ha’Aretz*, September 22, 2008.

¹⁵ Shay, *Achilles*, 5.

¹⁶ Niobe Way, *Deep Secrets: Boys’ Friendships and the Crisis of Connection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 19.

¹⁷ Ibid., 12, 21, 242.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1.

¹⁹ Brown and Gilligan, *Meeting*, 41.

²⁰ Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001/1847); Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1982/1960); Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding* (New York: Mariner Books, 2004/1946); Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Vintage, 2007/1970); Arundhati Roy, *God of Small Things*; *Tsitsi Dangarenba* (New York: Seal Press, 1988); Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John* (New York: Farrar Straus, 1985); Anne Frank, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, The Revised Critical Edition (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 719.

²¹ For an extended discussion of Anne Frank’s editing of her diary, see Carol Gilligan, *The Birth of Pleasure* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 85–113. Otto Frank, Anne’s father, also made some omissions of his own, but for the most part he followed Anne’s editing, presenting the diary to the world in the way she had prepared it to be seen. The *Critical Edition* contains all three versions: Anne’s actual diary, her edited version, and the first published version.

²² Eavan Boland, “What We Lost,” *Outside History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990).

²³ Judy Chu, *When Boys Become Boys: Development, Relationships, and Masculinity* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

²⁴ Donald Moss, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Man: Psychoanalysis and Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 137.

²⁵ Ibid., 140.

²⁶ Ibid., 141.

²⁷ Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Penguin, 2001), 418.

²⁸ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* 33, 170.

²⁹ Tolstoy, *Anna*, 410.

³⁰ Ibid., 435.

³¹ Ibid., 418–19.

³² Ibid., 414.

³³ Ibid., 419.

³⁴ Ibid., 425.

³⁵ Ibid., 429.

³⁶ I am grateful to Carole Obedin for this observation about Anna.

³⁷ Hawthorne, *Scarlet*, 120.

³⁸ Ibid., 160, 168.

³⁹ Hrdy, *Mothers*, 287.

⁴⁰ Paula Gunn Allen, “Who is Your Mother? Red Roots of White Feminism,” 18, in *The Graywolf Annual Five: Multicultural Literacy*, ed. Rick Simonson and Scott Walker (St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 1988), 13–27.

⁴¹ Gilligan, *Voice*, 85.

⁴² Tova Hartman and Charlie Buckholtz, “Are You Not a Man of God?” *Devotion, Betrayal, and Social Criticism in Jewish Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press).

⁴³ Avraham Shalom, “Head of Shin Bet 1980–86,” in *The Gatekeepers*, directed by Dror Moreh, 2012.

⁴⁴ Shay, *Achilles*, 209.