

FEMINIST APPROACHES TO MORAL LUCK

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To a large extent, what we do and the circumstances we find ourselves in are beyond our control.¹ Yet this fact presents a problem for the common view that we can be held responsible only for what we have direct control over. If we have control over very little, if anything at all, then to what extent can we be held responsible? A typical response by feminist philosophers is to accept the absence of control—or in other words, the presence of luck—but to insist that responsibility remains often enough. According to this view, where there is luck, there can also be responsibility (what we call, “luck with responsibility” below). At the same time, feminists accept, of course, that where there is luck, there might not be responsibility (see “luck without responsibility” below). In general, like other philosophers, feminists have a complicated understanding of the relationship between luck and responsibility. In this chapter, we aim to describe how their understandings flow out of their feminist commitments and also what avenues there are for future research on luck and responsibility in feminist philosophy. Avenues that concern luck *without* responsibility are our central concern.

Luck With Responsibility

In saying that luck and responsibility can go hand in hand, feminists are embracing the phenomenon of moral luck. They are accepting, in other words, that “factors decisive for the moral standing of an agent are factors subject to luck” (Walker 1991: 14). In order to make sense of this view, they defend theories of *agency*, *responsibility*, and *virtue* that take seriously the extent to which luck enters into our actions or character. They pay special attention, moreover, to what Lisa Tessman calls “systemic luck” (and what Claudia Card calls the “unnatural lottery”)—namely, luck that arises from social systems, particularly those of oppression and privilege (Tessman 2005: 13; Card 1996).² According to many feminists, the moral standing of agents can vary depending on their *systemic* luck, along with other types of luck.³

Given their prominence within feminist discussions about moral luck, we will explore in some detail the themes of agency, responsibility, and virtue.

Agency

According to some feminists, most notably Margaret Urban Walker (1991), there can be luck with responsibility (and *vice versa*) because of the nature of our moral agency. Walker rejects the common

view that we can be morally assessed only for what is due to us, to our agency, as opposed to what is due to luck. Such a view rests on a conception of agency that is problematic, according to Walker. It presumes, in contrasting our agency with luck, that the former is immune to luck, which could be true only if we existed outside of “the world of space, time and causality” (1991: 17). Instead, we are, of course, embedded in this world, “variably conditioned by and conditioning parts of [it]” (p. 22). Thus, we are, to use Walker’s language, “impure” rather than “pure” agents. Because we are still agents, however, we can be responsible for ourselves and others. We can therefore be subject to luck and moral assessment simultaneously.

But why embrace the notion of impure agency from a feminist perspective? Walker gives reasons in favor of this idea that are not especially feminist (1991). For example, she points to how it coheres with intuitions we tend to have about moral responsibility, such as the intuition that we can be responsible for easing others’ suffering even when we did not cause it. But there are also distinctly feminist reasons to accept the impurity of our agency and deny the purity of it. We want to make these reasons explicit, and in so doing, will add to the feminist literature on moral luck.

First, the feminist claim that moral as well as epistemic agents are “situated”—that is, within sociopolitical structures of gender, race, class, and the like—makes sense only if our agency is impure. Feminists tend to critique mainstream ethics and epistemology for ignoring how our social positioning shapes our moral and epistemic agency, including what we can be responsible for or burdened with (e.g., Card 1996; Tessman 2005, 2014); what knowledge, including moral knowledge, we can possess (e.g., Harding 1992; Code 1981); what moral or other emotions we are likely to have (e.g., Bartky 1990: ch. 6; Little 1995), etc. None of this would be true, however, if our agency were pure. More generally, if, as moral agents, we were immune to luck, then we would also be immune to oppression or privilege and to the effects, both negative and positive, that they can have on our moral and epistemic agency. But this thought simply does not cohere with most feminist ethics and epistemology.

Second, many feminists describe our agency as social or relational, which is also possible only if our agency is impure. Claudia Card puts the point this way in her work on moral luck: “Significant relationships affect who we become. They affect our basic values, our sense of who we are, our commitments, even our abilities to live up to those commitments” (1996: 30; see also, e.g., Mackenzie & Stoljar 2000). These relationships can be oppressive or, alternatively, empowering of people who are oppressed in society. By highlighting how they influence people’s values, identities, and the like, feminists are able to explain how psychologically oppressed some people are (Bartky 1990: ch. 2), and how resistant others are to their oppression. The view that agency is social clearly supports the notion that agency is situated. Both ideas rely, in turn, on our agency being impure—on our being subject to the luck, good or bad, that comes along with being shaped by certain relationships and certain social structures.⁴

Third, feminists should accept that agents are impure rather than pure, because a world of pure agents is not one that most feminists would welcome. Walker hints at this view when she explains why such a world is not one that anyone would welcome. As she writes,

[P]ure agents may not be depended upon, much less morally required, to assume a share of the ongoing and massive human work of caring, healing, restoring, and cleaning-up on which each separate life and the collective one depend. That the very young and old, the weak, the sick, and the otherwise helpless—i.e., all of us at some times—depend on the sense of moral responsibility of others unlucky enough to be stuck with the circumstance of their need will not be the pure agents’ problem.

Walker 1991: 25

It will not be their problem because they are only responsible for what they have done; but usually they will have done nothing to make it the case that others need caring, healing, or restoring. This fact explains why everyone would, or at least should, deny that moral agency is pure. But what does

it reveal about why feminists, *qua* feminists, should do so? The answer surely lies in the fact that to combat gender inequality in the performance of care work, we need to disabuse many men of the “commonsense idea” that they are responsible only for what they have control over. We need, in other words, to insist that their agency, along with women’s agency, is impure. We should do so, in short, not just for the practical reason of trying to ensure that people get the care they need, but also for the political reason of promoting equality between men and women.

Last and relatedly, feminists should reject the notion of pure agency because it is, arguably, a patriarchal construction. The idea that we can only be responsible, legitimately, for what we have done has allowed many men to get out of the hard emotional and physical work of caring for others, and to assume that women do this work simply because they desire to do it, not because they know that as human beings or beings in special relationships with others, they are genuinely responsible for meeting others’ needs.

In summary, one way that feminists have argued in favor of moral luck (of it being real⁵) is by homing in on the concept of agency and arguing that agency is impure. The main philosopher who has taken this tack is Walker. And although she is not explicit about this fact, there are distinctly *feminist* reasons to support her strategy, reasons that concern the feminist projects of highlighting the social and political dimensions of moral and epistemic agency, of redistributing care work, and of promoting gender equality. The details here point to how luck, including the systemic variety, can influence both our moral agency and our moral standing.

Responsibility

Another approach in the feminist literature to understanding how there can be luck with responsibility is to go into depth about the nature of responsibility and to detach responsibility—some forms of it at least—from control. Claudia Card adopts this strategy in *The Unnatural Lottery* (1996); there, to use her words, she explores “moral responsibility without the illusion of transcending luck” (p. 30). Card contrasts her account of responsibility with that found in Bernard Williams (1981) and Thomas Nagel’s (1979) classic work on moral luck. Moreover, she suggests that her account coheres better with the moral experience of people who have little social power compared to people who are privileged. Let us explain, starting with Card’s take on what we will call the Williams/Nagel view of responsibility.

The Williams/Nagel view is focused mainly on holding people responsible for what they have done: that is, deciding whether they are the proper objects of praise or blame. Responsibility here is *attributed* to others. In addition, it looks *back* to their past behavior. And it looks *down*, according to Card, since deciding who is deserving of punishment or reward has historically been a prerogative “of the powerful exercised for social control” (1996: 23).

Card proposes instead that “we look *forward* and *up*, toward the future and from the standpoints of those” who are socially marginalized (1996: 23; my emphasis). “From this perspective, we are likely to think more of *taking responsibility* than of attributing it,” she argues (p. 23; my emphasis). “The point of taking responsibility is often to construct or to improve situations and relationships rather than to control, contain, or dominate” (p. 23). Taking responsibility, particularly in the context of personal or informal relationships, has historically been the prerogative of women (Card 1990). They have had to take responsibility for the care of children and the care or support of husbands, extended family, and often family friends. They have had to manage their households and organize celebrations (e.g., birthday parties), holidays, visits from plumbers, and the like.⁶ Responsibilities of these kinds are forward-looking. And women have often felt that they had to take them on, because otherwise the work would not get done.

Although Card refers quite a bit to responsibility in relationships, she is primarily interested in the idea of taking responsibility for oneself—for who one is and who one becomes—having faced bad luck that is both systemic and that enters into one’s character (the latter being what Nagel calls

“constitutive luck” (1979: 28)). (On systemic, constitutive luck, see also Tessman 2005: ch. 1; 2014: ch. 7.) Card describes how systemic luck can cause moral damage to the moral characters of people who experience privilege and/or oppression. For example, a common mark of privilege is arrogance, and of oppression, ingratiating behavior toward one’s oppressors (Card 1996: 200). Having to take responsibility for the bad elements of one’s character that have resulted from privilege or oppression is a matter of luck, as is one’s ability to meet this responsibility. Card writes that “luck is involved both in the motivation to take responsibility and in our ability to carry through” (1996: 27). Overall, her account of responsibility helps to explain how social positioning can influence moral luck, especially the constitutive variety.

Card acknowledges that “[i]nstead of taking responsibility freely, we sometimes find ourselves with” responsibilities (1996: 29). Thus, despite focusing on taking responsibility, which is to some degree voluntary, she accepts that responsibilities are often involuntary. They can exist, as many feminists argue (e.g., Kittay 1999; Baier 1994; Held 1993), even when we did not or would not consent to being in the kind of relationship we now find ourselves in (e.g., one where the other party is highly dependent on us) or when we did not control the circumstances that brought these responsibilities about (e.g., the other party’s need). The reason why is that certain features of relationships—for example, the vulnerability of one party to the other or the needs of one party that the other is best placed to fulfill—can themselves generate responsibilities (Goodin 1985; Tessman 2014). In short, responsibilities can arise out of relationships (or again, out of certain aspects of them) rather than through any kind of voluntary undertaking.⁷ Walker has this idea in mind when she writes that “*responsibilities outrun control*” (1991: 19; her emphasis), and when she discusses why a world of pure agents is not one that any of us would welcome.

To conclude this discussion of responsibility, some feminist philosophers, most notably Card, have dealt with the challenge that moral luck poses by adding “depth to our understanding of responsibility” (1996: 21). The depth comes, moreover, by viewing responsibility from the perspectives of people who are socially marginalized, not only from the perspectives of those who are privileged. The account of responsibility that then emerges is one that both insists on and explains how our responsibilities outrun our control.⁸

Virtue

Feminists have also pointed to virtue to support the phenomenon of moral luck. Lisa Tessman reminds us that virtue theorists, including Aristotle and Rosalind Hursthouse (2001), accept that luck provides occasions for virtue (Tessman 2005: 27, 28). For example, Tessman quotes Aristotle as saying that “the man who is truly good and wise, we think, bears all of the chances of life becomingly” (*NE* 1101a1–5; Tessman 2005: 27). Feminists writing on moral luck tend to agree with the sentiment that virtue can require us to respond in particular ways to luck, good or bad. Yet they also highlight particular virtues that have this effect—what Walker calls “virtues of impure agency” (1991: 20),⁹ and what Tessman describes simply as the “virtues of the agent who has moral responsibility for things beyond her control” (2005: 28). Included among these traits are integrity, grace, and lucidity (Walker 1991: 19), although the virtue that feminists give the most attention in this context is integrity. In this section, we will explain why feminists, as feminists, have defined integrity as a virtue of impure agency, and in so doing, illustrate their claim that virtue ties luck and responsibility together.

The idea that integrity is a response to the “vicissitudes” of luck might seem strange (Walker 1991: 20), particularly for readers who are familiar with the philosophical literature on integrity, where there is little mention of luck. But consider popular accounts from this literature that define integrity in terms of consistency or coherence (i.e., among one’s desires or commitments) or of having a certain identity and living up to it (see Calhoun 1995). And notice that either achievement—consistency or being true to oneself—depends substantially on luck. That is the case from a feminist perspective

at least, according to which people experience oppression and privilege. Relevant here is the fact that oppressed people are subject disproportionately to double binds, where by their own lights, they are damned if they do and damned if they don't (Card 1996: 42; see also Frye 1983). Having an integrated self or being true to commitments that define one's identity ("identity-conferring commitments"; McFall 1987) is often very difficult, and is sometimes impossible, in such circumstances. Being free of these burdens, by contrast, is itself a matter of luck, that is, of privilege. These insights about luck and integrity, popularly understood, come from Card (1996: ch. 2).

Integrity is a virtue of impure agency also according to feminists who have developed new understandings of integrity, ones according to which integrity has social value, not merely the personal value that comes with inner unity or meeting identity-conferring commitments. Walker defends this sort of account in the literature on moral luck (see also Payson (2017) and also Calhoun (1995)). Walker writes that "integrity is the capacity for *reliably* maintaining a coherent moral posture [or identity], and ... this capacity is only proven under challenge" (Walker 1991: 21, note 6; our emphasis). For Walker, integrity is as much about reliability or dependability as it is about coherence and identity. People with integrity can be relied on not to "shrug off" serious harms they were unlucky enough to cause, for example (as in the case of a negligent driver who happens to hit a child; Walker (1991: 18)). They have the will to take responsibility in such contexts,¹⁰ and presumably the kinds of commitments that require them to do so.¹¹ If such claims about integrity are true, then integrity must be both a virtue of impure agency and a social virtue. It is the former because the challenges that provide occasions for people to act with integrity arise, in part at least, because of luck. And it is the latter—a virtue that puts us in the "proper relation to others" (Calhoun 1995: 252)—because it makes us reliable to others.

Feminists such as Walker and Card do not believe that to have integrity, we need to be *so* reliable or *so* consistent that we never change our values. It is important that integrity allows for value change, because bad systemic luck that enters into our characters gives us oppressive values. Thus, Card says that to "develop and maintain integrity, we need to discover, assess, and sometimes make changes in our values" (1996: 33). And in her later work, Walker describes integrity in terms not of mere reliability, but of "*reliable accountability*" (1996: 64; her emphasis). This latter view demands consistency over time not in our values, but in the accounts "we are prepared to give" of them and the actions that flow from them (Walker 1996: 72). In this way, integrity allows for personal transformation, even of a radical sort, which is important for feminists (see also Davion 1991; Payson 2017). Integrity is also designed on this view with systemic luck in mind, which can saddle us with values that, on reflection, we do not endorse.

Thus, feminists argue that integrity is a virtue of impure agency, and that virtues of this type show how luck and responsibility go hand in hand. These traits make us responsible for things that are simply a matter of luck; and feminist insights about oppression, privilege, and systemic luck allow us to see why we should count integrity among them. Intuitions of this sort also direct us toward accounts of agency and responsibility that help us to make sense of moral luck. In summary, then, from a feminist perspective, luck can bring with it responsibility because of the nature of moral agency, responsibility, and virtue.

Luck Without Responsibility

The above discussion reveals that, from a feminist perspective, we can have responsibilities—for helping others in need or healing moral damage to our selves caused by oppression, for example—in the face of luck. But feminists also recognize that there are limits on our ability to be responsible for what is our own good or bad luck, and that is true with respect to both systemic luck and what some feminists call "natural" or just "nonsystemic" luck (Tessman 2014: 243; Tessman 2005: 30; Payson 2017: 351). The debate here centers on whether systemic luck can generate *impossible moral demands*, which occur when we have responsibilities yet cannot fulfill them (particularly forward-looking

responsibilities; there is luck without responsibility of this kind¹²). Less discussed is the issue of whether systemic luck can produce *illegitimate moral demands*, specifically in cases where oppressive norms make us feel responsible for things we are not responsible for and for what may be just a matter of natural luck. In what follows, we discuss situations where, from a feminist perspective, luck and responsibility can come apart: more specifically, situations involving impossible or illegitimate moral demands. We also suggest where, in the feminist literature on these topics, there are gaps that future feminist work on moral luck should fill in.

Impossible Moral Demands

Feminists writing on moral luck tend to focus on the burdens that bad systemic luck place on people who are oppressed—those of trying, for example, to overcome moral damage to the self or of navigating through the double binds that are characteristic of oppression. These burdens can be insurmountable; for instance, it can be—and arguably normally is—impossible to rid oneself of psychological oppression. Some feminists debate whether, in such circumstances, the burdens are also moral in nature, in which case the agents in question would be morally responsible for doing what they simply cannot do, and moral failure would be inevitable on their part.¹³ The main parties to this debate are Tessman (2014) and Eva Kittay (2016), with the former holding the view that these sorts of demands—impossible moral ones—can arise out of bad systemic luck, and the latter disagreeing with her and with the more general claim Tessman makes that “ought” does not always imply “can.”¹⁴

The question of whether impossible moral demands could ever occur as a result of bad systemic luck really depends on whether “ought implies can.” Yet this issue (i.e., of whether “ought” truly does imply “can”) is not distinctly feminist,¹⁵ and so we will not rehearse the arguments feminists have given on either side of it. Instead, we will discuss what they have written about the kinds of moral responses people should give when they run up against limits to their own moral agency, ultimately because of bad systemic luck. These are situations in which the agents themselves or others expect them to take responsibility in a forward-looking sense, but they are unable to do so. They are situations of impossible moral demand or at least of the experience of such a demand.

Feminists have named among the appropriate responses to the circumstances just described integrity, anger, and regret.¹⁶ Jessica Payson’s (2017) work on integrity is relevant here, for example. She claims that in unjust social systems, the demands of integrity are impossible to fulfill (and thus, accepts the notion of an impossible moral demand). In her view, integrity requires that one not promote serious harm, which one does by participating in oppression, which itself is inevitable, according to Payson. Nevertheless, one can display some integrity—at what she calls a “meta-level”—by acknowledging the extent of one’s participation and by objecting to it (2017: 357).

The responses of anger and regret appear in Tessman’s work. She suggests that when confronted with what is often, in her view, an impossible demand—that of overcoming bad systemic constitutive luck—“a mixture of anger and agent-regret” is called for (where for her, both anger and regret are virtues; 2005: 30). To explain, she writes:

While situations of nonsystemic bad luck may just call for special virtues having to do with bearing or enduring the bad luck commendably as well as taking responsibility for its results, in the case of systemic bad luck—since the source of the bad luck can be identified and potentially altered through social or political action—the special virtues that are called for will also be those that help one to protest or even eliminate the systemic source of bad luck.

2005: 30; see also Payson 2017: 351

In other words, in circumstances where one cannot fully repair the damage caused by systemic bad luck, one can still resist the sources of this luck and one’s moral response to it should reflect this fact. Thus, rather than bear the luck “becomingly,” as Aristotle recommended (*NE* 1101a1–5), which

presumably involves having more positive emotions than regret or anger, one should feel—and perhaps depending on how bad the luck is, be *seething* with—these negative emotions.

In response to Tessman, we question whether anger and regret are the only, or the main, “virtues” that one ought to display in such circumstances. What about *grace*? Recall that Walker includes grace among the virtues of impure agency that she lists. Is it appropriate for people who are oppressed to display grace, if only occasionally, in response to impossible or difficult moral demands that they experience as oppressed people? Walker defines grace as “acceptance, non-aggrandized daily ‘living with’ unsupported by fantasies of overcoming or restitution” (1991: 21). Moreover, she, as well as Tessman, suggests that grace (or what Tessman simply calls “acceptance”; 2005: 31) *might* be appropriate when our attempts at healing the damage caused by oppression come up short. Yet nowhere in the feminist literature, that we know of, is there a moral theory of grace. Such a theory might show that, on occasion, one could respond appropriately to the weighty moral burdens of oppression without “fantasies [where they are indeed fantasies] of overcoming” or without negative emotions such as anger and regret, which can be all-consuming. Instead, one could exhibit grace. In that case, the “special virtues” that nonsystemic and systemic luck call for would not be so different that the latter never requires us to endure “the bad luck commendably” (assuming that involves accepting the limits to our powers of “overcoming”; Tessman 2005: 30).

Thus, feminists recognize that in the face of bad systemic luck, we will not always be able to live up to responsibilities that we actually have or that we or others believe we have. We will not be able to take responsibility, particularly in a forward-looking sense. Feminists disagree about whether moral failure is inevitable in such cases, which it would be only if the relevant responsibilities are real. More work is needed surely to settle this disagreement (i.e., over whether ought implies can), although we doubt that the work involved will be particularly feminist. What *is* a uniquely feminist project, however—one that should be taken up—is to develop a moral theory of grace specifically for situations of bad systemic luck.

Illegitimate Moral Demands

Feminists who reject the idea of impossible moral demands will say that expectations of rising above one’s bad systemic luck can be illegitimate. More generally, being made to feel responsible when one cannot be responsible is illegitimate. For these feminists, the impossible moral demands that Tessman (2014) refers to are simply illegitimate demands. That there is this sort of reaction to Tessman in the feminist literature shows that there is some awareness there about how systemic luck can impose illegitimate moral demands. But there is little discussion by feminists about this problem in general, including instances where oppressive norms make us feel responsible for what is a matter of pure natural luck. We will illustrate these cases briefly, which involve moral demands that are *clearly* illegitimate. We will also discuss cases where luck is ascribed to someone (“you are so lucky!”) in a way that is oppressive and produces an illegitimate moral demand. This second type of case does not appear at all in the feminist literature on moral luck, which is a significant gap, in our view.

One of us has written with Julie Ponesse (McLeod & Ponesse 2008) about a particular kind of case where people—women, specifically—experience an illegitimate moral demand because of bad natural luck combined with bad systemic luck. The relevant demand is that women blame themselves for infertility, so that their bad luck of being infertile (i.e., at a time when they actually wish to be pregnant) is bad moral luck of a certain sort.¹⁷ McLeod and Ponesse argue that these feelings of blame stem, in part at least, from pronatalist norms that make it women’s social role to bear and rear children. They exist, in other words, because of women’s bad systemic luck in sexist societies. Women’s self-blame for infertility is just an instance of a larger phenomenon, we assume, of people who are oppressed being encouraged to take responsibility (in the credit sense or otherwise; see note 6) for what is not their fault. The extent to which these people experience bad moral luck of this sort—where, again, the relevant moral demand is obviously illegitimate—should be a topic of greater concern to feminists.

Another topic that should garner attention in future feminist work on moral luck is the fact that ascriptions of luck, or of being lucky, can themselves be a matter of moral luck—or more specifically, systemic luck that issues in an illegitimate moral demand. We have in mind cases where people who are members of oppressed groups are told they are so lucky to have X—such as a spot at a prestigious university or the parents who were chosen for them in an adoption—even though others in a similar position would not be called lucky, or called that as often as they are. As well, the luck they are ascribed is moral because it comes with the suggestion that they should be grateful, perhaps abundantly so, for having X. One of us (again, McLeod) has children who experience this sort of thing, children who are transracial, intercountry adoptees. The comments that they (or McLeod) get about how lucky they are usually come right after people learn where they are adopted from. Granted her moral perception in these moments could be completely off, McLeod often feels that these statements are laden with racism and classism. (In that case, they are similar to comments directed at a poor student of color who is told he is so lucky to have got into Harvard.) What is more, they carry with them expectations of gratitude, which we believe are illegitimate.¹⁸ Hence, they are ascriptions not just of luck, but of moral luck. They also involve systemic luck, that is, if they are indeed motivated, if only unconsciously, by oppressive attitudes such as racism.

Our focus in this section has been on cases that feminists have largely ignored where systemic luck is moral and places illegitimate moral demands on oppressed people. In such circumstances, there is luck without any real responsibility, although oppressive norms dictate that there should be some responsibility (e.g., in the form of taking blame). We imagine future feminist work on these kinds of cases being interdisciplinary. For example, a feminist philosopher who has expertise in the literature on moral luck could pair up with a psychologist or sociologist on a project about the kinds of luck ascriptions we discussed in the previous paragraph (about the “lucky” student or adoptee). The psychologist or sociologist could analyze whether indeed, or how often, statements like these occur, and the philosopher could focus on the moral and political implications of them.

Conclusion

Our goals in this chapter have been to reveal what rich discussion there is in feminist philosophy about moral luck, but also the need for further discussion, particularly about the virtue of grace and about illegitimate moral demands in circumstances of bad systemic luck. We have focused on the relationship between luck and (moral) responsibility in feminist philosophy, which is complex as we noted at the beginning. In brief, feminists tend to believe that there can be luck with responsibility, especially the kind of responsibility that involves looking forward in an effort to take care of who or what needs to be taken care of. But they also recognize that there can be luck without responsibility. Their work centers on luck that is systemic, which people experience because they inhabit systems of oppression and privilege. Even bad systemic luck can carry with it responsibility, according to many feminists, which helps to explain both how morally burdened oppressed people can be and how morally wrong their oppression is.

Notes

- 1 In this chapter, we follow other feminists in interpreting luck in terms of a lack of control (see, e.g., Card 1996: 22).
- 2 Mainstream philosophical discussions about moral luck generally ignore this type of luck; they describe moral luck as nonsystemic and individualized.
- 3 Lisa Tessman denies that this is true for Eva Kittay in *Love's Labor* (1999). See Tessman (2014: 242) and Kittay's response (2016).
- 4 Walker writes that it “is characteristic of those who view moral luck as philosophically problematic or paradoxical to claim it is so in light of ‘our’ or ‘the ordinary’ concept of agency” (1991: 23). She questions who the “we” is by putting “our” and “the ordinary” in quotation marks. The “we” is clearly not most feminist philosophers, as our discussion about agency reveals.

- 5 That is, real as opposed to illusory or paradoxical (Walker 1991). Some philosophers say that moral luck is illusory—that “the ordinary” view of moral agency is correct: we are not responsible for what we do not have control over (see, e.g., Zimmerman 2002)—while others, including Thomas Nagel (1979), suggest that moral luck is simply paradoxical.
- 6 As this discussion suggests, taking responsibility can come in different forms. Card explains that it can involve managing what needs to be managed (the “administrative or managerial sense of responsibility”), making oneself accountable for something (the “accountability sense”), committing oneself to provide care or support (the “care-taking sense”), and also owning up to what one has done (the “credit sense”; 1996: 28). Card emphasizes that only the last of these is backward-looking, which reveals that responsibility takes many more forms than Williams and Nagel recognize.
- 7 This idea is an element of care ethics (Tessman 2014: ch. 7), although some feminists who endorse it describe themselves as having instead an ethics of responsibility (e.g., Walker 1998; Whitbeck 1983). Regardless, they tend to contrast this view about responsibility or obligation with a contractualist one. (On contractualism, see Ashford & Mulgan 2018.)
- 8 To be clear, it is not the case for feminists that *all* responsibilities necessarily outrun control—that the fact that we lack control in certain circumstances means that we lack all control. Card (1996) has this view, for example, which is common among compatibilists such as Daniel Dennett (2003, 1984), and John Fischer and Mark Ravizza (1998). Card writes: “Even the embeddedness of my computer software in a world that outruns its controls does not imply that the software does not really control anything or that we are always arbitrary to pick out the software rather than environmental conditions as relevantly responsible” (1996: 27). We are similar to the software in this regard (and we believe Walker would agree; 1991). To use Walker’s language, the fact that we are impure agents embedded in the causal structure of the universe does not mean we do not exhibit *any* kind of control.
- 9 Walker uses the existence of these virtues to defend her account of agency as impure (1991).
- 10 They will take responsibility not necessarily in the backward-looking sense of accepting blame, but at the very least in a forward-looking sense, perhaps of providing care or support. See note 6.
- 11 Walker suggests that there might be “minimal standards of correctness or adequacy” for the moral posture of a person with integrity (1991: 21, note 6). It seems clear that her account relies, however, on there actually being the minimal standard of accepting moral challenges that are either orchestrated by others or caused by mere chance (or both).
- 12 In such circumstances, we could act responsibly in the backward-looking sense of accepting some blame for not doing what we are responsible for doing; but we could not act responsibly in any of the forward-looking senses that Card describes (1996). See note 6.
- 13 On moral failure of this sort, see Tessman (2014) and Calhoun (1999).
- 14 A central goal of Tessman’s book *Moral Failure* is to argue that some moral requirements violate the principle of “ought implies can” (2014: 1). Kittay explicitly rejects this view in a review of Tessman’s book, where she insists that this principle “brings desperately needed sanity” to situations of injustice (Kittay 2016).
- 15 Related issues that are also not uniquely feminist are whether moral dilemmas can ever be irresolvable (see Hursthouse 2001) or whether there can be “*inexhaustible* source[s] of moral requirements,” as Tessman says there are when the needs of people are so great, they can never be fully satisfied (2014: 251).
- 16 One could add here shame, which is a response that Calhoun discusses (1999: 95; cited in Biss 2016: 564).
- 17 That is, a sort of moral luck that refers to the praise or blame that a person receives versus the praise or blame that the person deserves. This point of clarification comes from Robert Hartman.
- 18 Any claim that adopted children should be grateful is illegitimate in our view. Even with adoptions that are good ones (the family is well-functioning; there was no injustice involved in the process of adoption), the children simply get what they deserve, morally speaking. In that case, there is no occasion for gratitude.

References

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