

DISORIENTING RESPONSIBILITY

by

Ami Harbin

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Dated: March 18, 2011

External Examiner: _____

Research Supervisor: _____

Examining Committee: _____

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Abstract

Experiences of disorientation can be common and powerful parts of moral agents' lives, yet they have not been characterized by mainstream Western philosophers, and their effects have not been adequately recognized by ethicists. In this dissertation, I remedy these gaps by providing an account of disorientations as multi-dimensional experiences and by fleshing out a more nuanced analysis of disorientation within the framework of experienced agency. I argue that, contra the philosophical tradition, disorientations are not always bad for moral agency.

This thesis has two main aims: first, to introduce a philosophical framework to clarify experiences of disorientation and their effects; and second, to clarify the relation between disorientation and moral agency, showing how responsible action can both require and produce disorientation. In chapter one, I introduce disorientations as complex experiences of unease, discomfort, and uncertainty which vary in degree and in effects. In chapters two to four, I characterize disorientations on three axes: corporeal, affective, and epistemological. I argue that disorientations always involve all three dimensions of bodily, emotional, and cognitive experience and that shifts in body, affect, and knowledge can trigger experiences of disorientation. I draw on examples of how agents can become disoriented in periods of illness, trauma, grief, self-doubt, and education. In chapter five, I draw two lines of connection between disorientation and moral agency: *experiences of disorientation can help us act more responsibly, and acting responsibly can be disorienting*. In chapter six, I consider the political promise of disorientations, focusing on the way individuals' disorientations in response to a hate crime in their community prompted the creation of less harmful norms, and thereby a better place for individuals to live. In chapter seven, I conclude by outlining implications of my view for how we should face disorientations and what kinds of conditions should be in place to support those who are disoriented.

Disorientations do not always enable moral agency. Given that moral philosophers are better versed in the ways disorientations can harm, my project is to distinguish the ways they can help, contesting the assumption that moral agency is always better the more oriented we are.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In those rare moments when we lose orientation, we don't know where we are; and we don't know where or what things are either; we lose the thread of the world, and our perceptual field is no longer our access to the world, but rather the confused debris into which our normal grasp on things crumbles.

(Charles Taylor 1989, 4)

The point is not whether we experience disorientation (for we will, and we do)... The point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do—whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope.

(Sara Ahmed 2006, 158)

To become disoriented is, roughly, to lose one's bearings in relation to environment and others. Experiences of disorientation overlap with feelings of being bewildered, adrift, precarious, or lost. Although complete physical disorientations, where we lose track of all perceptual connection and consistency, may be as rare as Taylor suggests, my analysis is motivated in part by the conviction that other felt disorientations are more common than this, and more relevant for moral agency than philosophers have so far thought.

Disorientations can be common and powerful parts of moral agents' lives, yet they have not been characterized by mainstream Western philosophers, and their effects have not been adequately recognized by ethicists. In this dissertation, I seek to remedy these gaps by providing an account of disorientations as multi-dimensional experiences and by fleshing out a more nuanced analysis of disorientation within the framework of

experienced agency. I argue that, contra the philosophical tradition, orientedness is not always good for moral agents and disorientations are not always bad for moral agency.

My interest in experienced agency in general and disorientation in particular has come from both philosophy and life. I have long been interested in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* vision of motivation in the face of one's own death. One of the first philosophy classes I took focused on Heidegger's description of how Dasein comes to understand itself as uniquely responsible for its actions and to develop what Heidegger terms 'authenticity' in the context of a deeply jarring moment of anxiety. The structure of this moment was intellectually formative for me: intense difficulty can spur the development of agency. I have also long been interested in ethical accounts which complicate formulaic approaches to moral responsibility. Descriptions of the complexity of the moral terrain, the inter-implicatedness of agents, and the unevenness of the social contexts within which we act have resonated with me, particularly where I found them first in feminist ethics and social philosophy.

My interest in connecting disorientations to specific claims about moral agency was inspired in part by Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006). Ahmed claims that being queer can be disorienting in the context of heteronormativity, and that being disoriented can allow queers to live otherwise in the context of restrictive norms. Her book gave me my first opportunity to consider disorientations as experiences with their own moral potential. Ahmed's project was not to provide a robust characterization of disorientations, and her political interest was

limited to exploring the promise of disorientations within the heteronormative environments where queers live. As I started to research other sources, it seemed it had not been any other philosopher's project to characterize disorientations or to track their moral promise. Thinking of disorientation as involving, in part, experiences of being unsettled, uneasy, and uncomfortable, I started to look for references to settlement, ease, and comfort in philosophy (e.g., Aristotle on virtue as settled dispositions to act). I began to think more about moments of strangeness and strain described in some of the most interesting life stories, fictions, films, and histories.¹ It became apparent that moments of not knowing how to go on were often part of the lives of individuals I most admired for their resilience, courage, and humility. My interest in disorientations grew the more I saw them at work in positive ways in accounts of individual lives: prompting more responsible agency, more sensitivity to complex moral contexts, and political transformations. It became clear that moral philosophers needed a richer account of what disorientations could do.

1. Chapter Overviews

This thesis has two main aims: first, to introduce a philosophical framework to clarify experiences of disorientation and their effects (chapters two to four); and second, to clarify the relation between disorientation and moral agency, showing how responsible action can both require and produce disorientation (chapters five and six). Although disorientation is rarely theorized explicitly in philosophy, and implicitly chiefly as a

¹ Mary Cappello's *Awkward: A Detour* (2007) was instructive, as was Terence Young's book of poems: *Moving Day* (2006).

threat to individual moral agents, I claim that my understanding of disorientation can both do better justice to our individual experiences and help re-structure conceptual and political responses to the disorientations of ourselves and others.

Disorientations are multi-dimensional experiences, triggered by various events or shifts in our lives. As disoriented, we can feel out of place, uncomfortable, uneasy, and unsettled. The standard sense of being disoriented in physical spaces is related: as disoriented, we can feel and act lost, we don't know how to interact appropriately with our surrounding environments or with others around us. As disoriented, we tend not to know our proper objects of action and attention: what actions we should aim to complete, who or what we should interact with in the world, what stands to help or harm us. The diagnostic sense of disorientation used in medicine and psychology is connected: as disoriented, individuals can lack awareness of their identity, location, and temporal framework. I am using 'disorientation' to mean something more general and indexed to affective as well as corporeal and cognitive experience than these definitions suggest: I am highlighting a spectrum of experience that I suggest is ubiquitous in human lives.

We can be disoriented when jolted or pulled out of ease by something we observe, experience, or do, so that movements which once came naturally are made to seem difficult. We can also be disoriented when faced with new challenges of either small or significant dimension (e.g., teaching philosophy for the first time; becoming the first non-white US president), in new environments (e.g., how to re-enter a job market after having children), as part of new communities (e.g., first year of high school), or when we are

particularly constrained by our social contexts (e.g., receiving treatment in a hospital where no one speaks our language). When I say that a particular event or experience is ‘orienting’, I mean that it can lead individuals and groups to feel, and act on the basis of feeling, oriented. When I say that an event or experience is ‘disorienting’, I mean that it can lead individuals and groups to feel, and act on the basis of feeling, disoriented. We need to *feel* disoriented in order to be disoriented, but we need not know we are disoriented or be inclined to describe what we are experiencing as disorientations.

Being disoriented is related but non-identical to other kinds of experiences that have been better attended to by philosophers: as disoriented, I may feel that my identity is fragmented, I may struggle to develop reliable expectations, I may question my self-worth, and I may find it difficult to act wholeheartedly. Disorientations are unique in part because of their dual character: while they involve elements of feeling troubled, they can also involve feelings of piqued interest; while they can be shocking, they can also be surprising.

I suggest that it is helpful to think of disorientations as multi-dimensional experiences that in every case happen at all three levels of body, emotion, and knowledge.² It might seem as though almost any challenging human experience could be understood in part as a disorientation; the three-dimensional account prevents ‘disorientation’ from becoming too diffuse a concept, limiting the kinds of cases that

² I rely on an understanding of the interaction between processes of embodiment, cognition, and affect that will be contentious to dualists. My account of the multidimensionality of experiences of disorientation relies on the anti-Cartesian arguments of Elizabeth Grosz (1994) and many other feminists that establish that we cannot meaningfully analyse the agency and motivation of people without understanding how psychic experience both has an impact on and is affected by body function – the two cannot come apart.

interest me. The three dimensional framework applies to disorientations in two senses: 1) individuals experience disorientations on three levels, through bodily changes (e.g., racing heartbeat), affective response (e.g., panic), and epistemological shifts (e.g., confusion); and 2) disorientations can be triggered when something happens to an individual's body (e.g., illness), emotions (e.g., grief), or cognition (e.g., education). We might notice feelings of disorientation on one level before the others (e.g., when disoriented by learning about white privilege, we might notice confusion first, then panic, then a racing heartbeat), but the disorientations that interest me always happen on all three levels.

I focus on disorientations that persist over time. Events or experiences that were once disorienting can cease to be disorienting when, for example, the experience becomes normalized, even if a shocking experience continues over a long time. We can come to expect difficult experiences to continue, and even become disoriented when they cease. Likewise, experiences that do not spur felt disorientation at first can also come to be disorienting over time when, for instance, the weight or implications of an event sink in. Felt disorientation involves a wider set of experiences than initial shock, itself less likely to be sustainable.

Moral theorists in the Western tradition have tended to position experiences like disorientations as a threat to moral agency—as experiences that isolate, overwhelm, and counteract the cultivation of responsible action. I highlight Cheshire Calhoun in chapter three and Harry Frankfurt in chapter four as offering two recent expressions of such

views. It is true that disorientations do not always enable moral agency, and it is important not to glorify or over-aestheticize such difficult experiences. Disorientations might paralyze rather than empower when they are too thorough, deep, or sustained to be liveable. They can overwhelm us when they are too all-encompassing, when they occur at difficult times in our lives, when they occur too often or last so long as to be exhausting. They can unhinge us from positive moral orientations we have lived out in the past. Tolerance for disorientations will vary widely in keeping with varied histories, personalities, and strengths. What kinds of disorientation we have experienced in the past, and what we have been taught to expect can affect our threshold for tolerating disorientations (i.e., how much disorientation we can handle and experience as help rather than harm).

I begin in chapter two by describing corporeal dimensions of disorientations as embodied experiences *characterized by combinations of shock or surprise, unease, unsettlement, discomfort, and by feelings of being troubled*. In detailing corporeal dimensions of disorientation, I focus on four examples of bodily experiences that can trigger disorientations: trauma, illness, oppression, and body transformation (as in the experience of many transgendered individuals). I draw on descriptions of experienced embodiment from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Edward Casey, María Lugones, and others to situate my analysis of embodied disorientations in philosophies of embodiment which aim to characterize what it is to be settled in environments, and how individuals can become at ease in bodily habits. Such habits are very often disrupted by disorientations.

I draw on Susan Brison and others to clarify the important ways in which disorientation can be triggered by trauma. We can experience embodied disorientation whether we are trying to reckon with our own illness or care for others who are ill. As philosopher Havi Carel and physician David Servan-Schreiber describe, mental and physical illnesses can shift how familiar our bodies feel to us, how we feel we can act with or through them, and how we understand our position in communities and environments—these shifts can be very disorienting. Oppressions (like those which position us as ‘Other’ on the basis of gender, age, race, able-bodiedness, etc.) can further trigger experiences of disorientation. W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon both describe how oppressive identification—the simultaneous identification and marginalization as ‘other’—introduces disorienting tension between who I want to be and who I am allowed to be. As Eli Clare and other transgendered authors describe, gender transitions can trigger disorientations when, often after years of feeling uneasy in their recognized genders, individuals struggle to look, act, or sound like the gender they are, and the struggle for accurate gender recognition can involve ongoing disorientation over time. Experiences of trauma, illness, oppression, and body-transformation can trigger the multi-dimensional disorientations that interest me in ways which highlight their bodily dimensions in particular.

In chapter three, I suggest that affective dimensions of disorientations involve *experiences of unsettlement on an emotional level, involving unclear, inharmonious, or non-habitual affective experiences, whose strongest effects are felt in the disruption of*

emotional processes and relational involvements. To characterize the affective dimension of disorientations, I draw largely on three autobiographical accounts of affective struggle: Freshly Charles' video-logs ('vlogs'), posted through the past two years of F-to-M gender transition, bring out questions about how these kinds of shifts in emotional experience might be connected to the social and biological shifts of gender transition. Joan Didion's book *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2006) provides an autobiographical account of grief after the sudden death of the author's husband, John, in the context of the ongoing serious illness of her daughter, Quintana (who eventually also died at the age of 39, after the book was finished). And Minnie Bruce Pratt's article "Identity: Skin, Blood, Heart" (1984) tracks shifts and struggles in her processes of growing up as a white, educated, Christian-raised woman, marrying and having two sons, then coming out as lesbian, and pursuing political identification and activism. The affective experiences of these three trigger multidimensional disorientations.

I suggest that affective dimensions of disorientation can be distinguished by one of three characteristics: *felt indeterminacy* involves feeling unsure of how to identify or express emotions; *felt tension* involves unsettling experiences of interaction between emotions which feel like they are in conflict, muddying, or eclipsing each other; and *affective swell* involves dynamic intensity and pace of felt disorientation, where feelings expand and wane in waves that are in themselves disruptive. Standard approaches to connecting emotions to agency have stressed emotion's intersection with reason. I investigate how affective dimensions of disorientation could be promising for agency, not only when mediated by cognition. My account of affective disorientation is supported by

Ronald de Sousa's arguments in favour of emotions as things which function within processes of reason and agency, but offers an example of an affect that can challenge straightforward processes of reason, while sometimes simultaneously supporting processes of agency. And while Alison Jaggar attempts to account for how anger or revulsion can highlight oppression or structural injustice, thereby being promising for moral agency, I claim that disorientation can be promising even when it does not immediately point to a problem in the world.

In chapter four, I claim that epistemological dimensions of disorientation involve *experiences of disruption in processes of knowledge formation, application, and revision which challenge our position as knowers, reconfigure what knowledge we take to be reliable, and cause us to re-evaluate the strength of our commitment to knowledge claims*. I flesh out experiences of epistemological disorientation by considering situations of self-doubt and education. On a general propositional model of knowledge where 'S knows that P iff S has a justified, true belief that P', epistemological disorientations can disrupt the 'S' (subject) of knowledge, the conditions which enable 'S' to acquire or maintain justified, true beliefs, the processes of knowledge acquisition and maintenance, and the processes by which S's knowledge shapes how she acts and communicates. On a non-propositional model of knowledge, epistemological disorientations can disrupt everyday bodily and affective experiences, in ways which unsettle the knowledge we gain from them.

The history of philosophy supplies ample descriptions of how orienting it can be to recognize ourselves as competent knowers, often by characterizing how disruptive it can be to find we lack knowledge; philosophers have given rich descriptions of doubt, confusion, and ignorance. Particularly compelling are Descartes' *Meditations* and the first pages of Immanuel Kant's short piece "What is Orientation in Thinking?" which I read as offering insightful historical accounts of what it is to be epistemologically disoriented. The disorientations of both self-doubt and education can function to disrupt both processes of generating reliable expectations and the reflections on our preferences/desires that lead to decisive action. Frankfurt's account of the importance of decisiveness in the face of ambivalence or conflicting desires is often taken for granted: an agent who acts wholeheartedly seems better off than one who faces ongoing conflict. But if I am right to think that, contra Frankfurt, disorientations can sometimes benefit moral agency, and that processes of acting responsibly may sometimes feel more disorienting than orienting, a conceptual framework is needed to make sense of how this may be the case.

Drawing on philosophers of embodiment, emotion, and knowledge, and philosophical and autobiographical accounts of illness, trauma, oppression, body-transformation, grief, activism, self-doubt, and education, I provide an account of what disorientations are which maps areas of the conceptual terrain until now neglected in philosophy. Beyond the concrete ways in which we may pursue deliberate disorientations as attempted escape from responsibility (e.g., perpetually using recreational drugs), I take it that we are more familiar with the morally negative than

morally positive effects of disorientation: disorientations can paralyze, overwhelm, embitter, and misdirect moral agents. My focus is on the under-recognized positive potential of disorientations for moral agency.

In chapter five, I specify an understanding of aspects of the moral landscape in order to argue for specific ways in which disorientations can improve individuals' capacities for moral action given the character of agents and the conditions within which we act. I situate my view within moral psychology and recent ethical theory, drawing in part on Margaret Urban Walker, Iris Marion Young, and feminist relational theorists to clarify relevant aspects of the moral terrain, paying particular attention to moral agency in contexts of pervasive injustice. I connect the effects of multi-dimensional disorientations established in chapters two to four to my claims about specific conditions of agency in order to argue for my two-part ethical claim: *disorientations can allow individuals to act more responsibly, and acting responsibly in contexts of injustice can be disorienting.*

In chapter six, I offer a consideration of the political promise of disorientations in contexts of heteronormative sexual injustice. I distinguish my project from Ahmed's account of disorientations' promise for queers, and consider how the disorientations of all agents can help us generate more just sexual contexts, not by creating alternative paths for queer lives, but by creating less harmful sexual inheritances for everyone. I build on chapter five's arguments about the moral promise of disorientations to establish the political promise of disorientations given the harms of heteronormativity. I focus on the way Laramie, Wyoming residents' disorientations in response to a hate crime allowed for

the development of less harmful norms of sexual identification, and therefore a better place for individuals to thrive.

In chapter seven, I conclude by outlining two prescriptive implications of my account. If disorientations are morally beneficial as I claim, and if acting responsibly can be disorienting, I suggest that we may be called to respond to the presence of disorientations in our lives in ways which facilitate rather than deny their beneficial effects, and that we should create social conditions which support rather than alienate or harm individuals who are disoriented. I argue that we can sometimes be called to *reside in* disorientations, and that should create social conditions hospitable to those who are disoriented. While doing so is not likely to be easy, we might benefit greatly from coming to more tangibly acknowledge the presence and promise of disorientations in our lives.

2. Methodology And General Questions

In order to characterize disorientations as multi-dimensional, I draw on a combination of philosophical and testimonial accounts of experiences of being disoriented. In this sense, my methodology combines phenomenological and feminist approaches: I draw on others' descriptions of their own disorientations in order to offer a description of disorientations as lived experience, which is then open to recognition or challenge by others who feel I

have misrepresented or excluded their experiences.³ Based on how others respond to my analysis, I can better nuance my account and see whose experiences are troublingly absent from it. These experiences are not necessarily everyone's experience, nor are they clearly typical cases. My claims about disorientations and their dimensions would stand even if all the cases of disorientation I describe turn out to have involved people deceived about their own experiences.

For the first part of the moral claim—that disorientations can help agents act more responsibly in particular contexts—I am making existence claims about what disorientations and their effects are (e.g., disorientations are the sorts of experiences which can generate sensitivity to vulnerability), making conceptual claims about the moral landscape, including about the kinds of traits and capacities that can be needed for agents to act responsibly (e.g., responsible action can require sensitivity to vulnerability), and bridging these sets of claims in order to argue that the effect of disorientation X can generate trait/capacity Y in order to help moral agent Z act more responsibly in certain conditions. For the second part of the moral claim—that acting responsibly particularly in addressing social injustice can be disorienting—I am making existence claims about what disorientations and their triggers are (e.g., disorientations can be triggered by intense self-doubt), making conceptual claims about the moral landscape (e.g., that acting morally in contexts of injustice can require action towards indeterminate ends), and bridging these claims in order to argue that aspect of the moral landscape X can be a trigger of disorientation Y, causing moral agent Z to become disoriented when she acts

³ For analyses of feminist methodology, I looked to Susan Sherwin's "Philosophical Methodology and Feminist Methodology: Are They Compatible?" (1992), Ann Garry's "Minimally Decent Philosophical Method" (1995), and Lorraine Code's "Taking Subjectivity into Account" (in *Rhetorical Spaces* 1995).

responsibly in those conditions. I do not make speculative or empirical claims, for example, about the mechanisms by which disorientations have their effects. I start at the level of characterizing disorientations, their effects, the moral contexts within which agents are disoriented, and aspects of responsible action.

A note about terminology: following Walker and others, I do not have any technical differences in mind between ‘responsible action’ and ‘moral action’: in both cases, I mean acting in ways which sustain and support well-being given the actual situation of the world, its inhabitants, our needs, and our capacities for action. Walker employs a distinction between *morality* and *ethics* according to which morality is the set of practices, and ethics is the “reflective and normative study of morality” (Walker 2007, 3). Rather than arguing that this or any more rigid way of dividing ‘morality’ and ‘ethics’ or ‘moral’ and ‘ethical’ is necessary, I will employ Walker’s distinction as a useful clarificatory tool. My primary focus is on morality: I flesh out how disorientations involve complexities of felt embodiment, interaction, communication, and interdependence, how they can change how we experience and act in the world, and how the ways in which they change us can make us better moral agents. Experiencing disorientation helps *morality* in part by deepening our awareness of morally significant features of a situation which can improve our behavior as moral agents. Paying attention to experiences of disorientation helps *ethics* by giving us resources to deepen our philosophical understandings of what being moral involves.

I take for granted that individuals' experiences of disorientation can motivate them to act in ways they might not otherwise, and that these effects of disorientation can be relevant for moral agency. Moral motivation is only part of the picture of moral action, and too much focus on individual moral motivation in the context of theorizing action in contexts of injustice can be a problem. Nonetheless, analyses of the effects of experience on agency are still in need of clarification in philosophy, particularly for those experiences historically positioned as harmful.

General questions about disorientation inform each chapter. How are experiences of disorientation impacted or mitigated by social privilege? How might it be problematic to think of disorientations as beneficial only insofar as they make reorientations possible? How can we theorize the promise of persistent disorientations? When might we be disoriented without knowing it? My commitment to providing the ethical account I do means that my claims about disorientation leave aside for now other interesting avenues of consideration like those of disorientation and art, and disorientation and space/environmental philosophy.⁴

⁴ I think here of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, which many have said is a deeply disorienting experience to walk through. I also think of an art exhibit that opened at the Tate Modern in London while I was writing this dissertation: "A pitch-black art installation in London claimed its first victim on the opening day as a man walked straight into a wall, a report said yesterday. *How It Is*, by Polish artist Miroslaw Balka, opened to the public Tuesday in the huge Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern gallery. More than 12,500 people visited, with one person attended to by first aid staff, Tate said when asked about the incident. London's Evening Standard newspaper said the man hit the back wall and was escorted away with blood on his suit and a lump on his nose before being treated by first aid staff." (Source: "Ouch! Pitch-black exhibition claims its first victim" *October 15, 2009* Associated Press <http://www.smh.com.au/travel/travel-news/ouch-pitchblack-exhibition-claims-its-first-victim-20091015-gy7a.html>, accessed January 26, 2010). Some degree of disorientation seems to be intended in the case of the memorial as well as the installation.

There is no sure-fire way to predict whether a given set of disorientations will have a positive, negative, or negligible effect on moral agency. I do not intend to do such predicting, nor am I qualified to empirically analyze mechanisms that may send disoriented individuals in positive rather than destructive directions; rather, I claim that experiences of disorientation *can* have morally beneficial effects—itself a contentious point, which I hope can spur and support conceptual, psychological, and social scientific research into disorientation in the future.

Few philosophers have paid much attention to disorientations; most of those who do pay attention focus on the ways that disorientations can be harmful and bad. My project is to rehabilitate the concept of disorientation and urge us to appreciate the various ways disorientations can be helpful and good. This is challenging work, since it involves defending counterintuitive theses which cannot be analytically deduced or made universal. My goal is to highlight disorientations as in need of further consideration and to make visible their potential within our moral lives. I pursue this work through appeal to others' descriptions of them which I have found to be compelling, intriguing, and, surprisingly, encouraging.

Chapter Two: Corporeal Disorientation

When the mind is upset by some more overwhelming fear, we see all the spirit in every limb upset in sympathy. Sweat and pallor break out all over the body. Speech grows inarticulate; the voice fails; the eyes swim; the ears buzz; the limbs totter. Often we see men actually drop down because of the terror that has gripped their minds. Hence you may readily infer a connexion between the mind and the spirit which, when shaken by the impact of the mind, immediately jostles and propels the body.

(Lucretius 1994, 70-71)

Moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground. Disorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground or one's belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel liveable. Such a feeling of shattering, or of being shattered, might persist and become a crisis. Or the feeling itself might pass as the ground returns or as we return to the ground. The body might be reoriented if the hand that reaches out finds something to steady an action. Or the hand might reach out and find nothing, and grasp instead the indeterminacy of air. The body in losing its support might then be lost, undone, thrown.

(Sara Ahmed 2006, 157)

Experiences of bodily disorientation are ubiquitous. Disorientations are widely experienced, in various degrees, durations, and with varying feelings of voluntariness or control. Minor and major bodily changes, expected or unforeseen, welcomed or feared, episodic or ongoing—most of us will experience many bodily disorientations over the

course of years and lives. Growing, aging, and facing our deaths can involve significant disorientations as we are forced to confront new patterns of movement or self-care becoming available or unreachable. Injuries, changes in eating habits, the acquisition of new skill sets, becoming involved in new relationships—all these things can spur various kinds of bodily disorientation. When we are disoriented, we may temporarily not know how to go on, or to think about how disorientations may introduce new patterns of action.

Philosophies of embodiment vary according to the motivations, political orientations and theoretical backgrounds of their authors, but they tend to respond to the tradition of western philosophy which has underrepresented bodies when theorizing persons (Meynell 2009, 1-5). Despite the number of recent texts available from non-feminist perspectives (Bermudez et al. 1998; Casey 1987; Cataldi 1993, Gallagher 2005; Leder 1990; Low 1994; Mazis 1993; Mensch 2009; Weiss and Haber 1999; Welton 2001) as well as feminist ones (Ahmed and Stacey 2001; Bordo 1993; Campbell et al 2009; D’Cruze and Rao 2005; Diprose 1994; Gatens 1996; Grosz 1994; Heyes 2007; Kirby 1997; Maclaren 2009; Price and Shildrick 1999; Probyn 1991; Weiss 1999; Young 2005; Zita 1998), there is very little consideration of disoriented bodies in the philosophical literature about embodiment. In this chapter, I draw connections that feminist philosophers have allowed for, highlighting the political need to consider not only *oppressed* embodiment, as feminist philosophers like Sandra Bartky, Susan Bordo, and Iris Marion Young have done so well, but also more general human experiences of *disrupted* embodiment. Elizabeth Grosz and Gail Weiss are two whose advances are especially important for my analysis. While Grosz considers disorders and disruptions of

embodiment, she does not aim to connect corporeal disruption to political or ethical promise; and while Weiss establishes a sustained account of social embodiment and ethical action, she does not aim to take up questions of how *disrupted* embodiment can be crucial for the development of moral agency.⁵ Neglect of the ethical promise of disorientation is a persistent gap in even the most sophisticated philosophies of embodiment. I begin to correct this neglect in part by expanding our sense of the range and nature of disoriented experience.

Corporeal dimensions of disorientations are experiences *characterized by combinations of shock or surprise, unease, unsettlement, discomfort, and by feelings of being troubled*. They are often experienced as feelings of being out of place, unfamiliar, or not at home. When everyday practices of embodiment are disrupted, we can become disoriented, almost always in ways which make us unsure of how to go on. One of the strengths of a theoretical focus on disorientation is its built-in focus on embodiment: not only do we necessarily *experience* disorientations as embodied (as all human experience is), we are also pushed to *theorize* disorientation as such, given that bodies are at the heart of our disorientations.

In section one, I clarify experiences of felt orientation. In section two, I consider disoriented embodiment by investigating concrete experiences that can trigger disorientation, as well as other ways in which we enact it. In section three, I consider

⁵ Cheshire Calhoun argues that “Depression, demoralization, depersonalization, Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, existential ennui, and meaning-shattering confrontations with one’s own mortality belong on [a] list of agency impairing internal states of individuals” (Calhoun 2008, 194). Although Calhoun never uses the term, I take this article to be an important feminist articulation of the threat of disorientations.

how the effects of experiences of disorientation can change our possibilities for action. As I claimed in chapter one, corporeal experiences are relevant to my analysis of disorientation in two senses, as affective and epistemological experiences are also: bodily dimensions are part of the experience of disorientations (alongside affective and cognitive dimensions), and disorientations can be triggered by disruptive bodily experiences. Section one of this chapter focuses on corporeal dimensions of disorientation, and section two focuses on corporeal triggers of disorientation. If disorientations are as important to experienced agency as I claim they are, philosophers need to account for why that is—I take my analysis to be a start in that direction.

1. Felt Orientation And Habit

Feeling oriented means knowing what objects, broadly conceived to include literal things, beings, plans, and outcomes, should guide our attention, what direction they are in, and how best to attempt to reach them. Felt orientation can take various bodily forms, including relaxation, surefootedness, and anticipation—most relevant for my purposes is the feeling of ease. In this section I track discussions of orientation from Maurice Merleau-Ponty through phenomenology, feminist philosophy and queer theory, in order to relate felt orientation to learned patterns of pre-reflective movement and experiences of being at ease in the world. Phenomenological clarifications of felt orientation and ease are important to my overall analysis;⁶ like orientations, felt disorientations involve pre-

⁶ Phenomenological analysis aims to describe lived experience, bringing taken-for-granted backgrounds and pre-reflective aspects of experience into discussion. It is not systematic empirical research which works from testable hypotheses about objects in the world. As I draw on phenomenologists for my project, I highlight the importance of their interest in and descriptions of *human experience*.

reflective experience, and the unease they involve is often difficult for us to identify through reflection.

A) Orientation And Body Memory

We are likely to feel oriented when our habits and practices of embodiment align to some degree with those of our communities. Physical orientation is in important senses *learned*, insofar as we are taught to practice habits that allow for consistency of movement, action, and interaction in geographical and social worlds. In acquiring habits, we solidify what Edward Casey theorizes as body memories (Casey 1987, 149-153)—the complex memories that become built into the tendencies of our muscles to move in certain ways, and the proclivities of our bodies to practice patterns of navigation and movement. We develop tendencies in basic ways of sitting, standing, reaching, pausing, as well as in more complex ways of leaning on subways, carrying infants, and wheeling wheelchairs. We might recognize body memories at work when finding a book in a library we know very well: the way our bodies move quickly to the correct shelf, smoothly scanning rows and call numbers, slowing as our eyes do finer recognition work, stopping close to the right spot, kneeling down or looking for a step stool.⁷ We might also think of our embodiments during rituals we have practiced in social institutions (e.g., crossing ourselves), coordinated movement (e.g., marching in protest), or skill

⁷ I take this to be parallel to the case Merleau-Ponty describes: “When I move about my house, I know without thinking about it that walking towards the bathroom means passing near the bedroom, that looking at the window means having the fireplace on my left, and in this small world each gesture, each perception is immediately located in relation to a great number of possible co-ordinates” (Merleau-Ponty 2008, 149).

development (e.g., tossing down a skateboard before jumping onto it again).⁸ These sorts of examples involve patterns of habit learned over time, most likely because they are necessary or helpful for our lives, and they involve the coordination of various parts of our bodies which, when they work well together, can provide satisfying feelings of being at home, competent, and calm. Felt orientation seems rightly described by some dictionaries as the feeling of ‘having one’s bearings’. Casey emphasizes our tendencies towards feeling oriented through the following scenario:

It is striking that when we arrive in a new place to stay even for a short visit, we tend without any premeditation to establish a group of fledgling habits such as putting the drip grind coffee in a particular spot, our laundry in another, books in still a third, as well as rising at a certain hour, reading the newspaper at a certain time, etc. These are habituating actions: they help us to get, and to stay, oriented. They establish a base of assurance and ease upon which more complicated, or more spontaneous, activities can freely arise... Habitual body memories liberate us from the necessity of constant reorientation. (Casey 1987, 151-152)

Body memories depend on not only ourselves and other people, but also on the objects and environments with which we interact; as Casey notes, often our efforts toward creating felt orientedness aim to set up our local world in ways which facilitate habitual practices.⁹ We find ourselves bracing for the swing of subway trains,

⁸ Thanks to Jake Feldman for a rich description of how orienting this can feel on various levels, which always intersect with how individuals live out gender, class, and age.

⁹ We learn such orientations from various social participations in the world, in particular by seeing how others enact their orientations, and in developing habitual body memory we also gain knowledge about objects in the world. As Maclaren explains, “In addition to perceiving others’ perceiving, we see in others’ bodily orientations toward their perceptual objects *something about these objects*” (Maclaren 2009, 31). I

counterbalancing squirming toddlers on our hips, and anticipating gaps between street and sidewalk when in wheelchairs without reflective awareness that we are doing so. Body memory leads to felt orientedness by making some embodiments so intuitive we do not (because we need not) notice ourselves or others enacting them.¹⁰

Sara Ahmed, Kym Maclaren, Casey, and Young all draw on Merleau-Ponty's account of habit to theorize less deliberate habits than those requiring explicit skill development; distinct from learned habits (e.g., typing), they detail more basic tendencies to move and control our bodies, and to perceive our surroundings. It helps to note a difference between the kind of bodily habits Merleau-Ponty is interested in and the more reflective senses of habit used by some other philosophers. Whereas, for example, Aristotle would focus on the cultivation of habits taken up deliberately, understanding these sometimes as embodied, sometimes as not (e.g., in efforts to develop more virtuous character), Merleau-Ponty and those theorizing habits in his vein are interested in the less reflective habits that are learned, often informally, or taken up almost instinctively as human beings navigate their physical and social environments. Merleau-Ponty is interested in the habitual body as pre-reflective orientation. Understanding these orientations as pre-reflective is not to say they are not open to characterization, discussion, reflection, or change; rather, we do not regularly *develop* such habits by first characterizing, discussing, or reflecting on them. As he puts it, "My life is made up of

return to Maclaren's account when I discuss further the embodiment of emotion and how emotional tensions are embodied experiences.

¹⁰ We also need to take stock of how the body memories that we gain in learning particular skills (e.g., Casey's example of playing the organ; or know-how about dining etiquettes) result from the educations available to us. Ease in certain circumstances is less available to certain groups depending on economic status, gender, race, age, mother tongues, and so on. Thus ease of orientations (e.g., towards some musical instruments, or toward a fancy dining table) can be unavailable depending on privilege and situation.

rhythms which have not their *reason* in what I have chosen to be, but their *condition* in the humdrum setting which is mine” (Merleau-Ponty 2008, 96).

Merleau-Ponty theorizes the pre-reflective orientation of human bodies by balancing philosophical claims about everyday human (‘normal subject’) tendencies towards orientation against extensive analyses of irregularly shaped, skilled, or perceiving bodies.¹¹ Characterizing the human tendency towards consistent patterns of movement, Merleau-Ponty explains, “What it is in us which refuses mutilation and disablement is an *I* committed to a certain physical and inter-human world, who continues to tend toward his world despite handicaps and amputations and who, to this extent, does not recognize them *de jure*” (2008, 94). In most cases, human bodies orient toward the world appropriately, interacting with objects and others in practiced and expected ways. “In the case of the normal subject, the body is available not only in real situations into which it is drawn. It can turn aside from the world, apply its activity to stimuli which affect its sensory surfaces, lend itself to experimentations, and generally speaking take its place in the realm of the potential” (Merleau-Ponty 2008, 125). Merleau-Ponty seems to be claiming that normal orientations are liberating because they allow bodies to conserve effort and energy in everyday actions, and because they usually help those with ‘normal’ bodies develop confidence that eases not only the actions these people practice regularly, but also actions in new contexts. This connection between the embodiments we practice daily and the development of confidence in more risky

¹¹ See especially Merleau Ponty 2008, 284-311. Merleau-Ponty regularly refers to such persons only as ‘patients’, though concerns about the appropriateness of this, given the troubles of medicalization and paternalism particularly acute in the scientific context of his writing, seem to prevent other phenomenologists from following him in doing so.

situations helps make sense of why children who have been encouraged to move in multiple ways in a variety of physical environments (e.g., high off the ground, in water) are more likely to be confident about moving even in environments they have not encountered before. Merleau-Ponty's detailed considerations of patients' experiences (see "The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motility", 118-170) show his interest in understanding orientation in part by considering its failures. The cases that interest him most are those involving people who suffer from disordered perceptual fields, inability to react appropriately to stimuli, failure to detect irregularities in their experience, and difficulty recognizing the extent and limits of their own bodies. The discussions of pathology aim to clarify why and how functioning perception, movement, and body-awareness are important components of what it is to be a 'normal subject'—what it is for a person to have perceptual mechanisms that function well, allowing her to move easily in the world.

B) Orientedness And Ease

As Ahmed characterizes it, "To be orientated, or to be at home in the world, is also to feel a certain comfort...The word 'comfort' suggests well-being and satisfaction, but it also suggests an ease and an easiness" (Ahmed 2006, 134). Although orientedness in physical and social worlds allows for smoothness of movement, when our orientations are shaped by oppressive social norms, such orientations can themselves be troublesome. Young's article "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality" gives a familiar example of how orientations can at the same

time allow for and prevent ease of movement. Young employs Merleau-Ponty's analysis of lived intentionality to argue that girls and women enact a double movement: "Women often approach a physical engagement with things with timidity, uncertainty, and hesitancy. Typically, we lack an entire trust in our bodies to carry us to our aims" (Young 2005, 34). As a result of the harms brought on girls and women by the gender-based threat of bodily invasion and objectifying gaze, we come to see our bodies in perpetually conflicted ways: as things to be both employed/acted *through* (subjects) and protected/acted *on* (objects) (Young 2005, 38). Young does not provide an analysis of disorientation, but her account begins to open space for the ethical significance of disorientation by showing why 'being oriented' is not always synonymous with living well: in contexts where harmful social norms are enforced, orientations which bring us limited forms of ease in the world can be in tension with the possibilities for action that are best for us. The gendered orientation of women's bodies both is and isn't easy: enacting it makes it possible to feel at ease given sexist and heterosexist norms, but the tension and restrictiveness it requires are a major part of what is involved in feeling ill-at-ease, as Bartky's analysis of psychological oppression has shown (1990, 30).¹² Women's efforts to feel safe and secure (e.g., walking home at night only when in the company of a man) can reinforce oppressive norms. Problematic pre-reflective orientations can ease our movement and interaction while being bad for us overall (e.g., not taking up too much space on the sidewalk as a black man in largely white racist communities). Acting in ways which allow for ease can directly counter our capacities to enact non-dominant

¹² Trying to change norms ourselves by, for example, sitting with sprawled rather than crossed legs can make us very uneasy; women might tend to feel more comfortable in the strained orientation of crossed legs than we would if forced to take up deliberately more expansive, open stances and actions—those kinds of actions would very likely be disorienting.

identities (e.g., ‘woman’), and acting in ways which allow for ease in the world even when these actions align with our identities (because our identities align with those that are dominant) can conflict with what is best for us as individuals and communities overall: a less oppressive set of norms. Being at ease in the world is not always best for us, whether our identities or desires are policed or protected by community norms.

María Lugones introduces what remains one of the best accounts of felt unease, showing how experiences of being out of place often accompany positions of marginalization. Lugones’ analysis is inspired by a question about what seems to be an inconsistency in her own identity: in certain ‘worlds’, she is playful, and in others, she is not. The account she develops in order to explain the phenomenon of inconsistent identity aspects can be summarized as follows: being an outsider in some social worlds as a result of having parts of her identity positioned as marginal can make for corporeal and affective feelings of being ill-at-ease in those worlds. We can be ill-at-ease in worlds in her terms when we are not fluent speakers, not ‘normatively happy,’ or not humanly bonded in them (Lugones 2003, 90).¹³ We are likely to be ill-at-ease there even if in other worlds, where we are not positioned as marginal in those ways, we do not feel ill-at-ease. Lugones separates the lack of ease from differences in our characteristics: “Though I may not be at ease in the ‘worlds’ in which I am not constructed as playful, it is not that I am not playful *because* I am not at ease. The two are compatible. Lack of playfulness is not caused by lack of ease” (Lugones 2003, 93). According to Lugones, the lack of ease we have in some worlds is promising in that can cue us to *notice* (without

¹³ According to Lugones, when I am ‘normatively happy’ in a world, “I agree with all the norms, I could not love any norms better. I am asked to do just what I want to do or what I think I should do. I am at ease” (Lugones 2003, 90).

altering) the differences in our characteristics in different worlds (e.g., Lugones comes to notice that she is playful in some worlds and not in others). As she explains, “My problematic case, the being and not being playful cannot be solved through lack of ease. I suggest that I can understand my confusion about whether I am or am not playful by saying that I am both and that I am different persons in different ‘worlds’...I am a plurality of selves” (Lugones 2003, 93). So being ill-at-ease can help her pay attention to what first appear as troubling inconsistencies of selfhood; upon reflecting on the inconsistent characteristics, she can come to understand selves and selfhood differently, as involving plurality. It is through experiences as outsider, felt unease, shifts in attention, reflection, and changed understanding that Lugones comes to be able to act differently, which she details under themes of practicing openness, world-travelling, and loving perception (2003, 96-98).

Lugones’ analysis of unease is strong for two reasons: 1) it details a central way in which experiences of unease can be promising insofar as they spur shifts in attention, and thereby new understandings of selfhood. Philosophers have largely failed to attend to the promise of discomfort, and Lugones’ approach is novel and needed. 2) Her analysis is informed by a complex rather than simplistic understanding of how ease relates to dominance and marginalization. Although members of dominant groups often experience more ease within their social worlds than those they dominate do, this is not always the case. Being at ease is a matter of degree, and those with dominant identities can feel various degrees of unease themselves, especially because one individual rarely possesses dominant characteristics or privilege in all domains at the same time. It is

possible that neither police nor policed can be fully at ease in contexts where some aspects of identity continue to be marginalized.

Both Lugones and I explore the political promise of felt discomfort, in part by detailing the relation of discomfort to the status of individuals within the normative apparatuses of social groups. My focus on disorientation is broader than Lugones' analysis of felt unease, and I consider the promise of disorientations in more multi-dimensional ways, particularly through aspects of *embodiment* that are undertheorized in Lugones' account.¹⁴ Like her, I hold that disorientations can allow for shifts in attention that cultivate ethically productive reflection. More than she does, however, I aim to chart how embodied experience is central to making those shifts in attention possible. I also aim to account for how disorientations can allow for changed action *not exclusively because of* processes of attention, reflection, and changed understanding. In chapter four, I detail the political benefits of felt disorientation for knowledge; for now I want to emphasize that disorientation's promise is neither wholly epistemological, nor primarily dependent on our processes of reflection. Phenomenological analyses of pre-reflective orientations support my account of how disorientations and their effects on agency can also be pre-reflective.

Orientations are more relevant to my claims about the ethical promise of disorientation the more they depend on social norms and corresponding socially-gained

¹⁴ Lugones characterizes ease largely through highlighting ease of affect, identification, and interpersonal interaction. When my emotions, processes of self-identification, and relationships go most smoothly, I tend to be at ease. I agree that these are all components of ease, but suggest the need to also think about experiences of ease at the level of *body* more than Lugones has.

senses of self-worth or entitlement. Since power structures inevitably involve the dependence of those with power on those with less of it, as many Foucauldian genealogies maintain (e.g., see Diprose 1994, 18-27; Heyes 2007, 6), some groups' experiences of social ease will depend on the unease of others. It can be easy for me as an educated white woman to interact in the social world (e.g., to conveniently buy what I need, to know that others could be available to take care of children if I ever need them to, to move smoothly through security checks when I travel) partly because racialized individuals do a lot of work that makes my life easy (e.g., manufacturing goods in bad conditions, being available to provide underpaid childcare, and being perpetually profiled when travelling). As Ahmed explains it, "The availability of comfort for some bodies may depend on the labour of others, and the burden of concealment" (Ahmed 2004, 148-149). Some of the cases which interest me most are those where we feel oriented or at ease largely because of our capacities or inclinations to live within rather than against normative structures. The *disorientations*—of dominant and marginalized individuals and groups—that correspond with these cases have the power to disrupt our positions within such structures and the social norms themselves.

Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* description of a broken-down hammer works well as a concrete example of transitions from ease to unease—I will mention the image now and return to it in chapter five. Simplifying Heidegger's description, a working hammer may not stand out from its surroundings; we might use it so easily that we never reflect on its character or location, we may not remember what it looks like or where we left it. But when a tool that has until now fit seamlessly into our lives breaks down or

goes missing, it stands out, as does our need for it and its position with respect to other tools (see Heidegger 1962, 75, original emphasis; see also analysis in Ahmed 2006, 46-48).¹⁵ The bodily ease of felt orientation is like this: we can be most likely to notice that we were at ease only when we become partially or seriously disrupted, uneasy, or when we no longer know how to go on recognizing salient objects in ways that had until now been habitual. In short, we can be most able to recognize our orientations when we become disoriented. As is clarified in the next sections, disorientations can spur recognitions of norms and our enactments of them.

Phenomenological analyses of learned bodily habits allow for a clearer understanding of how physical orientations are developed pre-reflectively, and how experiences of ease can depend on practicing the habits most appropriate to particular contexts. These accounts set the stage for my analysis of disorientation in two important ways. First, the normative structures that have a troubling impact on our bodily habits and orientations (e.g., sexism, racism) affect us at deep levels, making these structures all the more dangerous because, for the most part, we neither reflect on the ways they harm our movement, nor enact the restrictions they impose deliberately. The importance of theorizing symptoms of harms expressed in basic bodily orientation will become clearer in my analyses in section two of how sexism and racism shape basic body habits. Second, the bodily disorientations that interest me involve experience at these deep levels; these disorientations are all the more uncomfortable because we are less likely to be accustomed to identifying pre-reflective body experience. When we are less likely to

¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty makes a similar point when he says that “The blind man’s stick has ceased to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight” (Merleau-Ponty 2008, 165).

recognize harmful habits, we can be less likely to seek out or change what may be causing them (e.g., anti-black slurs that express racist norms). We can also be less likely to see the subtle or surprising ways in which they might already be helping us identify and act more ethically.

2. Embodying Disorientation

Disorientations include those times in which expected or comfortable embodiments become stalled or restricted. As Casey explains:

The main function of orienting is to effect familiarization with one's surroundings.

To be disoriented, or even simply unoriented, is to find these same surroundings unfamiliar, *unheimlich*...In particular, it is not to know which way to go or to turn—which route to follow. Getting oriented is to learn precisely which routes are possible, and eventually which are most desirable, by setting up habitual patterns of bodily movement. (Casey 1987, 151; see also Ahmed 2004, 146-155)

Although Casey phrases orientation and disorientation spatially here, we should also note felt experiences of temporal disorientation, where we become out of step with practiced life-rhythms of communities (e.g., by a suddenly disrupted sleep schedule) or institutions (e.g., by retirement after years of working) in ways which can feel like serious displacement.

Experiences of disorientation can make it challenging to go on because what lies ahead is invisible, unreachable, or too tenuous seeming to hold onto. It might be because

the ‘going’ seems impossible, because we are motivated by too many incompatible ends to be moved anywhere successfully, or because our bodies seem unable to be movers.¹⁶ Experiences of disorientation often introduce awareness of what we are feeling—disorientation can shock us into noticing our environments as less hospitable and our bodies as less our own. Although we might become most aware of embodiment when our bodies are grossly dysfunctional, changes in body image that accompany bodily transformations also suffice (e.g., Young’s account of pregnant embodiment; 2005, 46-61).¹⁷ Here, I distinguish two sets of experiences that relate to disorientation: those which *trigger* it, and those which are *enactments* of it. These kinds of disorientation and sets of experiences are not exhaustive, but function as a basic framework within which I detail disorientations through descriptions of embodied experience. I chart how kinds of felt disorientation intersect with sets of experiences (e.g., showing the disorientations triggered by traumas) case-by-case below.

A) Triggering Disorientation: Trauma, Illness, And Oppression

Typically when discussing experiences of disorientation, some event or set of experiences is often highlighted as having *caused* the disorientations we experience. Retrospective narratives of disorientation tend to establish something as the instigator, and typically the triggers described are *extreme*: perhaps a drastic shift in geography, health, relationship,

¹⁶ This might overlap with some of Harry Frankfurt’s discussion of individuals constrained by volitional necessity in *Necessity, Volition, Love*, where people “find it impossible to bring themselves to perform certain volitional acts... They are subject to a kind of volitional necessity, in virtue of which there are conceivable acts of willing that they are unable to perform” (Frankfurt 1999, 80). I take up Frankfurt’s work at length in chapter four.

¹⁷ Some women describe having desires for the physical experience of pregnancy, especially *for* its unexpected effects and the unanticipated transformations it brings.

or resources. Triggers need not be negative events: we might find ourselves disoriented after experiencing a major growth spurt, falling in love, landing a dream job, or suddenly becoming free of financial strain. Other kinds of experiences can spur felt disorientation in other interesting ways; while extreme cases like major traumas can highlight the embodied experiences of disorientation most clearly, focusing too much on extreme triggers can also threaten to make disorientations seem more exceptional, less widely experienced, than they actually are.¹⁸ In this section I detail embodied experiences of disorientation by considering three distinct kinds of life experiences that can trigger them: trauma, illness, and particular instances of oppression. I highlight these to give a sense of the range of experiences that can trigger disorientations—from the everyday to the severe—and to give a sense of how some disoriented individuals have described their experiences on corporeal dimensions.

i) Trauma

In outlining my broader project of relating disorientation to ethics in early conversations and presentations, a pattern emerged that initially surprised me: after just a brief description of the gist of the work—‘theorizing disorientations as having unexpectedly positive implications for moral agency’—others very often mentioned or asked about Susan Brison’s account of her traumatic assault in *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*. In one sense this was expected; I had recognized immediate resonance between my project and Brison’s. But the prevalence of such responses suggested an underlying

¹⁸Learning to drive can be deeply disorienting in body, perhaps particularly when done later in adulthood, and the disorientations involved allow for the learning of skills that make new actions and identifications possible—they are more than mere side-effects.

issue: disorientation has been deeply associated with *trauma*, and a major part of my analysis of corporeality and disorientation would need to clarify this intuitive, undertheorized, and non-exclusive relation. A major side-effect, result, or aim of trauma can be the disorientation of those who experience it; I draw on Brison and others here to clarify the important ways in which disorientation can be triggered by bodily experiences of trauma, and ways in which the disorientations triggered by trauma involve corporeal as well as affective and epistemological dimensions. Disorientations can be completely unrelated to trauma, themselves often non-traumatic, and are in fact far more ubiquitous and morally promising than traumas are in our regular lives. It is important to uncover both the insights and distortions offered by this common association.

Traumas are variously defined, along medical, psychological, legal, and political lines. In *Trauma and Recovery*, a touchstone for current thinking about trauma, psychologist Judith Herman describes traumatic events as follows:

Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning...Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. Thereafter, a sense of alienation, or disconnection, pervades every relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds to the most abstract affiliations of community and religion. (Herman 1992, 33, 52)

Trauma will be experienced differently depending on whether it is accidental, initiated by another person, known or unknown, once or multiple times (e.g., Brison's assault; the ongoing sexual abuse of children by family members), by more than one person (e.g.,

Matthew Shepard's assault), or by circumstances outside the control of anybody (e.g., the 2010 earthquake in Haiti). Cathy Caruth defines trauma as a harm that we are unprepared for (1996, 62), and Brison further distinguishes her own view by specifying traumas' initiators: "What survivors of trauma have in common, on my account, is that they experienced utter helplessness in the face of overwhelming, life-threatening violence of human origin" (2002, 139 n. 5). Herman's relational and embodied framework for understanding trauma resonates well with Brison's account of her experience:

For the first several months after my attack, I led a spectral existence, not quite sure whether I had died and the world went on without me, or whether I was alive but in a totally alien world...I sat in our apartment and stared outside for hours, through the blur of a detached vitreous, feeling like Robert Lowell's mother, described in one of his poems as mooning in a window 'as if she had stayed on a train / one stop past her destination'...I realized that I exhibited every symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder—dissociation, flashbacks, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response, sleep disorders, inability to concentrate, diminished interest in significant activities, and a sense of a fore-shortened future. (Brison 2002, 9, 15)

Brison's perspective on her past and future shows how, alongside corporeal experiences, trauma can change expectations about what tasks will be interesting or manageable, what spaces will feel safe, and how other people will respond to her; these shifts in expectation can be deeply disorienting. The disorientations that disrupt the positive expectations I have about my life (e.g., that my home will be safe, that other people can be trusted not to harm me) can be very difficult to endure.

Brison is cited for her insights into how trauma disrupts selfhood, and for how it introduces complexity into over-simplified philosophical accounts of memory and personal identity.¹⁹ Characterizations of traumatic memory remain controversial, ranging from phenomenological analyses, to ones more informed by psychological practice or cognitive science. As Casey theorizes it phenomenologically, traumatic body memory can involve various degrees of unease, displacement, and paralysis, or, less gravely, clumsiness or awkwardness, in contrast to the habitual body memory that provides us with ease of movement (Casey 1987, 154-157). Brison's understanding of traumatic memory is more like Herman's, where protected experiences of remembering are part of treatment for trauma (1992, 175-195; 213). Even the memory practices endorsed by Brison and Herman, of reconstructing the story of the trauma through testimony and situating these testimonies as part of one's life narrative, are themselves often very disorienting—particularly when they do justice to the uncertainty and dynamism of survivors' understanding of their pasts.

Disorientations triggered by trauma can be complicated by experiences of diagnosis and treatments, which are themselves disorienting in particular ways. Brison describes in detail the medical examinations that immediately followed her assault, the twelve days she spent in a French hospital, and her eight hour deposition where police officers transcribed her account of what had happened—as in many cases of violent assault, post-event processes can feel like repetitive invasions. Descriptions of events as having been traumatic can themselves be seriously disorienting, particularly when they prompt us to recast loved ones or cherished experiences into a narrative of predominantly

¹⁹ See especially Brison 2002, 40. We might think of the phrase: “I was beside myself.”

harmful times in our lives. Brison describes the feeling after reading Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*: "I wasn't crazy. I was *traumatized*. My responses were normal, to be expected, after such a terrifying event" (2002, 111). Brison had identified her behaviour against societal norms and her own past as 'crazy' and her judgement was then altered in keeping with Herman's framework—not crazy: *normal*, expected, traumatized. Given that many serious traumas are still not regularly recognized as such, it can be particularly disorienting for survivors to be told they are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in a social environment that fails to recognize their pasts as traumatic. As Laura Brown explains:

The dominant, after all, writes the diagnostic manuals and informs the public discourse, on which we have built our images of 'real' trauma. 'Real' trauma is often only that form of trauma in which the dominant group can participate as a victim rather than as the perpetrator or etiologist of the trauma. The private, secret, insidious traumas to which a feminist analysis draws attention are more often than not those events in which the dominant culture and its forms are expressed and perpetuated. (Brown 1995, 102)

Treatment of trauma seems to involve, at base, attempts to recognize what has initiated the trauma, its possible long-lasting effects, and the ways in which a survivor's current situation affords her/him paths for secure and desirable action.²⁰ All these steps can involve disorientation, particularly when our communities fail to recognize us as traumatized. Surviving severe trauma requires serious emotional, physical, and cognitive

²⁰Disrupting the neural pathways we have created and sustained over time as a result of trauma, as is the aim of some cognitive therapies, can interrupt patterns of thought (e.g., tendencies towards catastrophic thinking) and require that we develop new patterns of association (e.g., that better reflect our capacities and the support of our communities and physical worlds). Sokolowski provides one explanation of post-traumatic re-development of neural pathways (2008, 236-237).

work, and sometimes ongoing traumas or lack of resources preclude us from even having the opportunities to pursue the work required. Brison's account is a good example of individual trauma, and my later analysis shows how the hate-crime assault of Matthew Shepard involved traumas for many individuals in his community. Identifying the potential promise of disorientations triggered by individual traumas requires acknowledging the complexity of the processes: we do not become disoriented in ways removed from or irrelevant to our relational involvements, disorientations cannot be promising apart from social support, and when individuals share stories of their disorientations (e.g., as can happen in consciousness raising), new communities can be borne.

Brison's account of the weeks and months after her assault help show how the disorientations of trauma can support ethical agency in one way by heightening sensitivity to vulnerability. Sensitivity to the vulnerabilities of bodies can be sharpened or dulled as a result of trauma, and where it is heightened, it can lead to action that is in many contexts harmful (e.g., sadism). I take it that cases where trauma survivors become moral monsters, or where abuse breeds abuse, are sufficiently well-known; without romanticizing them, I aim to give voice to another set of possibilities, that the disorientations negotiated by trauma survivors can help cultivate sensitivity to bodies in ways which lead to more ethical action. Disorientations can help us recognize the vulnerability of bodies in part by slowing us down—when I move with the most ease in the world, my body is less likely to occur to me as something in need of care, rest, sustenance, or alteration. Disorientations may also highlight the extent to which the well-

being of my body relies crucially on the work of others (see Joan Tronto's analysis of how the confidence and ease of privileged bodies can rely on the care of others rendered invisible; 1994, 101-124). As disoriented, I may become more likely to recognize how my ease of interaction in the world has depended on others who care for me—I had until then attributed it to my own capacities and autonomy.

The widespread association of disorientation with trauma is not surprising, but the fit between trauma and disorientation should be seen as both important and loose. The link between trauma and disorientation is important in part because theorizing the promise of disorientations triggered by trauma can help support resistance to thinking trauma has any more power to harm than it actually has. But the fit between trauma and disorientation is loose: trauma can lead to disorientations, though it does not always (e.g., as in cases where certain forms of trauma are normalized or where trauma victims dissociate), and disorientations result from much other than trauma.

ii) Illness

Illnesses can be traumatic in our lives, but also involve a spectrum of embodied experience more common than trauma, which often requires that individuals, small groups, and populations face and adjust to disorientations (e.g., the disorientation of a loved one's HIV diagnosis and our adjustment of embodied interactions; the disorientation of H1N1 flu sweeping cities and governments' adjustment to quickly organize vaccination). When severely injured, my capacities for movement and sensory

experience may be temporarily or permanently compromised; the more relevant a body part to my everyday life, and the less available resources for supplementing or artificially re-establishing its presence (e.g., splints, wheelchairs, false teeth), the more disoriented I will be when it is injured. If I become seriously ill having enjoyed good health, the experience and the medicalization entailed can be disruptive to self-concept, daily activity, and both interpersonal and institutional relationships in ways, I suggest, that are almost always disorienting. If my illness is particularly *foreign* or unrecognizable to my community, whether I have been ill from birth or some later point, I am more likely to find living in the world disorienting. Illnesses can introduce the need to pay attention to our bodies more than usual, to care for them differently, or to stop using them in ways we have done unthinkingly in the past. It is unsurprising that disorientation is often a partial symptom of illness, especially when in medical contexts being disoriented means (more narrowly than my multi-experiential definition of felt disorientation) experiencing difficulties of spatial, temporal, or personal recognition: not being able to respond accurately to questions of where, when, or who I am.²¹

Mental and physical illnesses can shape how familiar our bodies feel to us, how readily we feel we can act with or through them, and how we understand our position in communities and environments (e.g., changes in contagions, susceptibilities, and energy levels can change capacities for being around other people, in extreme temperatures, or for extended periods of time). Even minor disruptions in body homeostasis can be

²¹ According to the glossary of technical terms in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV)*, disorientation is defined as “Confusion about the time of day, date, or season (time), where one is (place), or who one is (person).” It was in this sense, I take it, that after clinics and hospitals stopped testing for H1N1 in Halifax patients, self-diagnostic aids listed ‘disorientation’ as one of the flu’s most severe symptoms.

disorienting, requiring that we act to restore the balance. Grosz focuses on the disorienting ways in which illness can change body image:

Changes to the body and organs as a result of illness or disease are reflected, even if indirectly, in changes to the body image. For example, even if the cancer of a subject is not experienced as such, there is nonetheless a set of accompanying changes in the strength and state of tiredness of the body. Each physiological and psychological change in the body has concomitant effects on changes in the body image. (1994, 84)

We can experience embodied disorientation in response to or in processes of illness, whether we are ill ourselves, or are caring for or in close interaction with others who are ill. We also cultivate such disorientation in response to illness, often in contexts of trying to reckon with our own illness or care for others who are ill (e.g., when someone refuses to cut her own hair until her partner's grows back after chemotherapy). Illnesses themselves are deeply socially informed, not only in terms of classification and the social experience of being ill, but also in how certain illnesses are embodied responses to collective social dysfunction.²² Processes of diagnosis can be experienced as reorienting, further disorienting or both: reorienting insofar as they can make sense of foreign bodily sensations or appearances and establish paths toward healing or better quality of life;

²² Setha Low's analysis of *nerves* is a good example of these phenomena: "*Nervios/nerves* sufferers talk about what they are experiencing in a variety of ways: they say that they feel as if they are trembling or shaking all over, that they are jittery or that their skin seems to jump up and down. They complain that they feel unusual sensations such as hot or cold enter their bodies, or that they feel tired, as if their energy was drained away and their bodies were deflated. Some individuals say that they lose consciousness, faint or feel outside of themselves. In almost all cultural contexts, sufferers express the *nervios/nerves* experience as feeling 'out of control' as if their bodies were moving, contracting, or disappearing, and were no longer theirs" (Low 1994, 140). *Nerves* is a complex collection of embodied experiences that can be deeply disorienting, while being very differently experienced and described by women in distinct social circumstances. Low argues that *nerves* never exists apart from the social distress of particular communities, and is always in response to moralized dimensions of social expectation and duty (Low 1994, 139-145, 156-159).

disorienting insofar as they can make already confusing symptoms seem overwhelming, initiate procedures that make us feel weaker, and sometimes introduce the possibility of untreatability or death. Likewise, while processes of treatment can be disorienting when they introduce foreign experiences and substances into our lives, they can also be deeply orienting as they establish day-to-day rhythms, and make us feel like we are headed in the right direction, despite often feeling physically worse before feeling better. Finishing or transitioning between treatments can disrupt such feelings of orientedness.

The disorientation of illness is sometimes also that of facing the mortality of myself or those around me.²³ Philosopher Havi Carel faces early death and a 10-year life expectancy when she writes the following:

Illness changes everything. It changes not only my internal organs, but my relationship to my body, my relationship to others, their relation to me, to my body... In short, illness changes how one is in the world. Moreover, the world of the ill person changes; it transforms into a different landscape, filled with obstacles. Distances increase. It becomes uncanny. The world of the sick belongs to a different universe from that of the healthy, and the interaction between them is clunky, difficult, abrasive...The geography of my world is no longer a shared one. It belongs to me alone, and separates me from the people I walk with. The healthy

²³ Death is perhaps the most widely experienced and best considered (though usually with other terminology) kind of disorientation in the western tradition, which is part of the reason I focus on other kinds here. Epicurus diverted attention from it, Plato let it direct the *Phaedo* towards embodiment, Heidegger offered the most sustained account of how facing death will cause anxiety in the present. Weiss reads Heidegger on death as less corporeal: “In the end, for Heidegger, this resolute acceptance (of our own death) is quite abstract and, like Sartre’s bad faith, it is depicted more as a conscious than a bodily affirmation” (1999, 156). This may be true, but the descriptions of the felt groundlessness and anxiety that come before the acceptance from the key passages in *Being and Time* are nonetheless rich expressions of felt embodiment – some of the best non-explicit theorizing about felt disorientation available. Felt anxiety in this sense will be considered further in the next chapter.

ones who don't even notice they are healthy... Our life stories are meant to unravel as we go along, at a rate of one second per second. No slower, and certainly no faster. But I was given a crystal ball through which, with painful accuracy and nauseating detail, I can see my future: further decline, hopeless prospects, premature death. (Carel 2007)

Facing illness can be disorienting as Carel describes when we recognize it as facing death. Although being diagnosed with only a very short time to live can also be profoundly orienting, crystallizing our priorities for us, the experience of death (our own or another's) in many cases introduces unease, discomfort, and feelings of not knowing how to go on. As Carel describes it, illness and the proximity of her death disorients her day-to-day movements, identifications, and relationships. Our own and others' illness can remind us of our mortality, either by speeding it or just making it a live rather than distant possibility. Given that death might be the most simultaneously common and devastating experience of our lives, fatal illnesses are bound to be radically disorienting. Disorientations in the face of death are not only the most widely considered by philosophers, but perhaps also those we most often recognize as morally transformative.

Although I am highlighting how illness can be disorienting, it is nonetheless important for my view that orientation does not become conceptually or normatively aligned with *health* and disorientation with *illness*. It might be tempting to think of disorientation as a body stage to grow out of (e.g., the disorientation of puberty), or as an illness to be cured, but a major claim of mine is that disorientation can benefit our possibilities for identification and ethical action even (and in some cases, especially)

when we do not reorient out of it. While illness can be disorienting, we should not conceive of disorientation as illness. Long-term experiences of illness can involve disorienting stages of tests, diagnoses, treatments, waiting, re-testing, and so on. Processes of long-term or chronic illness tend to involve complex disorientations and reorientations, especially when we rely on medical institutions and practices that orient us as ‘patients’ and reward us for compliance. Descriptions of serious illness, themselves inflected by institutional narratives, refer to what are for individuals very complex life experiences. Illness perhaps more than other triggers of disorientation exemplifies the general point that it is impossible to separate all experiences of disorientation from partial and dynamic reorientations. At the same time, examples of illness press us to think about the promise of disorientation apart from the benefits of reorientation by considering how disorientations in the face of serious illness have led many to profound positive shifts in what we value.

Physician and researcher David Servan-Schreiber was diagnosed with brain cancer at 31 years old, and proceeded into treatment, a relapse, and further treatment. His book *Anti-cancer: A new way of life* is an account of his experience of, and research into, practices of cancer treatment and prevention. Chapter three, “Danger and Opportunity,” provides an excellent example of how the disorientation he experienced, triggered by illness, diagnosis and treatment, compels a shift towards more relational action. Servan-Schreiber describes the disorientation of shifting from physician to patient as follows:

I had known casually the neurosurgeon I was immediately referred to. We’d had patients in common, and he was interested in my research. After my tumor was

discovered, our conversations changed completely. No more allusions to my scientific experiments. I was asked to lay bare the intimate details of my life, describe my symptoms in full...Stripped of my professional attributes, I joined the ranks of ordinary patients. I felt the ground giving way beneath me. (2008, 17)

While waiting and preparing for surgery, Servan-Schreiber endures a number of strange shifts, many due to the contrast between the ease of his life as a professional and the complexity of his life as a patient. Interspersed through the awkward and confusing moments are clear realizations of interpersonal meaningfulness and subtle shifts in priorities. He notices his partner's beauty more vividly during those weeks; he opts for a surgeon who inspires confidence and best understands his patients over one with better technique or more immediate availability. One particular interaction, on the night before his operation, strikes him as indicative of a shift:

Anna and I had driven to New York, and I'd parked in the hospital lot. I was standing there, breathing the fresh air during those final few minutes of freedom before admission, tests, and the operating room. I noticed an elderly woman who was obviously on her way home after a hospital stay. She was alone, carrying a bag, and walking with crutches. Unaided, she couldn't manage to get into her car... I felt drawn to her by a surprising momentum that sprang from my situation as a fellow patient. This wasn't compassion, it was a gut feeling of fraternity. I felt close to this woman, made of the same fabric as this person who needed help and wasn't asking for any. I put her bag in the trunk, backed her car out of its space, then helped her while she settled into the driver's seat...The encounter warmed my

heart. We, the vulnerable, could help each other and smile. I went into surgery in peace. (Servan-Schrieber 2008, 23)

The earlier point about how traumas can prompt the cultivation of sensitivity to vulnerability is true about illness as well, and examples of illness suggest another effect of disorientation: disorientations can necessitate *prioritizing*. Our responses to illness highlight how disorientations can necessitate a paring down of interests, needs, and intentions that is both restrictive and productive. When feeling disoriented in physical spaces, I develop awareness of economical movements, of the shortest routes, of the most significant dangers to avoid, of how to predict what kinds of action will get me to my destination, or of how to re-locate it. Illnesses regularly trigger minor and major felt disorientations, changing how we experience our embodiments and identities, and how readily we feel we can act. Although such periods of unease and discomfort do not always accompany illness, and we do not understand illness to carry a teleology of disorientation (i.e., becoming sick *in order to* initiate disorientation), as a result of the disorientations we often experience when we are ill, we can hone our efforts; recognizing what objectives are most important, we can better focus on working towards or in support of those goals.

iii) Oppression

Disorientations can be triggered by embodied experiences other than traumas or events involving direct physical contact or sickness: we can experience disorientation on the

body as a result of oppressive identifications or gazes that at once identify and marginalize, positioning us as *other* (e.g., ‘woman’; ‘disabled’; ‘old’). As in the case of trauma and illness, oppressive identifications do not always disorient us, and may be likely to do so less the more we experience them. Oppressions can disorient us differently than trauma and illness, given that trauma and illness can happen more *to* the body, and oppression can have effects more where the body interacts with others and the world—but these lines are blurry, given especially how often oppression coincides with bodily injury and how often trauma and illness complicate bodily configurations in the social world.

Descriptions of how oppressions can disorient on bodily levels are particularly vivid in W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk* (1996; original publication 1903) and Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967; original publication 1952). Du Bois analyzes the double consciousness that resulted from his early experiences of racism growing up in Massachusetts in the late 1800’s. His description of one memory in particular is an informative description of how felt oppression can trigger disorientation:

It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were. I remember well when the shadow swept across me. I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England...In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys’ and girls’ heads to buy gorgeous visiting cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned on me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or

like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. (Du Bois 1996, 16)

In this quick exchange, the gaze and reaction of the girl identifies Du Bois as black, in opposition to or exclusion from her whiteness, and simultaneously marginalizes him from the play she and others in the class are enjoying. Du Bois remains a member of the class at some times, while being excluded at others; or rather, will always be both included and excluded. As a result of racism, Du Bois identifies the felt disorientation of early double consciousness, the duplicity of being both same and different, “an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (Du Bois 1996, 17). Du Bois’ double consciousness is in some ways similar to Marilyn Frye’s double bind, where there are two exclusive options for action, neither of which does justice to a woman’s identity or needs (Frye 1983, 2-4). Double consciousness can be felt as conflict (Du Bois 1996, 5) a lack of effective strength (6), being weighed down or handicapped while needing to run (9), despair (9), and helpless humiliation (10). Being identified as ‘a problem’ makes both appropriate objects and actions unclear:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife...he simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American...without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face...this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or to revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism. (Du Bois 1996, 17, 164-165)

Du Bois' embodied conflict is perhaps best communicated when he describes his dual reaction to the death of his very young son:

He died at eventide, when the sun lay like a brooding sorrow above the western hills, veiling its face; when the winds spoke not, and the trees, the great green trees he loved, stood motionless... Hearken, O Death! Is not this my life hard enough—is not that dull land that stretches its sneering web about me cold enough,—is not all the world beyond these four little walls pitiless enough, but that thou must needs enter here...All that day and all that night there sat an awful gladness in my heart,—nay, blame me not if I see the world thus darkly through the Veil,—and my soul whispers ever to me, saying, ‘Not dead, not dead, but escaped; not bond, but free.’ No bitter meanness now shall sicken his baby heart till it die a living death, no taunt shall madden his happy boyhood. (Du Bois 1996, 172-174)

Racism invades even Du Bois' experience of burying his son, making it a dual struggle: grief at the loss of such a young child, and relief that his son was spared the torment of being black in America. Du Bois is tortured throughout the story, but pushes himself to make the embodiment of such tension clear. There is no correct response to the white girl's glance, the duplicity of his education and career, or the death of his son; the objects of action are perpetually unclear. So one complex answer to Du Bois' question “What does it feel like to be a problem?” is: *disorienting*.

Racialization is expressed further through another experience of a white gaze. Fanon describes the event, his perspective as theorist-activist, and then, abrupt and surprising, a bodily reaction:

Of course I have talked about the black problem with friends, or, more rarely, with American Negroes. Together we protested, we asserted the equality of all men in the world. In the Antilles there was also that little gulf that exists among the almost-white, the mulatto, and the nigger. But I was satisfied with an intellectual understanding of these differences. It was not really dramatic. And then...And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema.

Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table. The matches, however, are in the drawer on the left, and I shall have to lean back slightly. And all these movements are made not out of habit but out of implicit knowledge... (Fanon 1967, 110-111)

Even in so easy a movement as reaching for cigarettes and a lighter, Fanon experiences his body as weighty and awkward after meeting the eyes of a white man. He imagines his movements as stilted and heavy. As Ahmed highlights the salience of Fanon's description for thinking of disorientation:

Racism 'stops' black bodies inhabiting space by extending through objects and others; the familiarity of the 'white world,' as a world we know implicitly, 'disorients' black bodies such that they cease to know where to find things—

reduced as they are to things among things...The disorientation affected by racism diminishes capacities for action. (Ahmed 2006, 111)

Fanon attempts to shift his disorientation into more single-minded expressions, resolving to laugh or cry (112), to move slowly and enact calm (116), to investigate and demand explanation (120, 117), to get angry and defend himself (118). But his efforts are troubled by, in his own words, *certain uncertainty*, the persistent dualness identified by Du Bois. Concluding his early description of meeting the white man, Fanon expresses the success of the racist identification: “On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?” (1967, 112). Yet at the end of the chapter, Fanon returns to the opposing force, the pressing need to defend black identifications as not merely objects: “Nevertheless with all my strength I refuse to accept that amputation. I feel in myself a soul as immense as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest of rivers, my chest has the power to expand without limit. I am a master and I am advised to adopt the humility of a cripple” (1967, 140).

Du Bois and Fanon both describe how oppressive identification—the simultaneous identification and marginalization as ‘other’—introduces disorienting tension between who I want to be (someone who “sits with Shakespeare”; Du Bois 1996, 90) and who I am allowed to be (“an object in the midst of other objects”; Fanon 1967, 109). One among many nuances in Du Bois and Fanon’s rich analyses is the indication

of how the troubling reduction of identification that results from anti-black identification—where each is collapsed from being *person/citizen* to being *black man*—can make for political urgency. The tensions of double consciousness exemplify disorientations, when, as in the lives of Du Bois and Fanon, marginalized identities are not completely crushed by multi-dimensional practices of domination that aim to do so. The disorientations of such tensions can distill and make more urgent the identificatory needs of those who are marginalized. The political urgency that can result from such disorientations is evident in how both theorists turn immediately from descriptions of disoriented embodiments to focused visions of anti-racist political action. Disorientations like those described by Du Bois and Fanon can direct our attention to urgent and often risky tasks.

Whereas trauma, illness, and experiences of oppression can *lead to* felt disorientations, we can *enact* disorientations in different ways when we change parts of our lives, or experience them changing, which happens more deliberately at some times than others. In the next section, I propose and examine three levels of such change in order to highlight more of the transformative power of disorientation: when these and other aspects of our embodiments change, we can gain possibilities for action in sometimes surprising ways.

B) Enacting Disorientations: Bodily Self-Transformation

Self-transformative behaviour takes various forms, at times private or public, at others, individual or collective, and at others some or all of the above. Minor forms of bodily

self-transformation include practices of body piercing, scarification, and tattooing. These can be partial enactments of the disorientation of life stages, rituals, commemorations, rebellions, identifications, and commitments, and the actual experiences of them are sometimes described as deliberate choices to rest with (or test abilities to withstand) intense sensation during disorienting times. Not all cases of deliberate body transformation are enactments of disorientation, but some are; and not all cases of deliberate transformation which do involve disorientation have an impact on individuals' or groups' possibilities for agency, but some do.

In addition to changes in body appearance, disorientations can be enacted when we engage in some kinds of bodily activities that connect physical movement to affect and cognition. Cressida Heyes' account of yoga provides a description of such enactment:

One never knows, exactly, how one will be transformed by yoga. Contra the popular image of gentle, calming stretches, some poses fill me with burning rage. On an intensive teacher-training course, I experienced innumerable rounds of violent sobbing and a profound sense of grief when holding certain 'trigger' poses deeply and for a long time; at the same time my depression—a problem over many years of my life—gradually and remarkably lifted. It was only through a bodily practice that I could address some inexplicable, deeply rooted emotional nexus...Bodies have a way of exceeding our will. They refuse to open or stretch or reach or stay strong as we hope, or they suddenly release or hold up or twist just when we had thought a particular pose was impossible. The practice of yoga teaches one to accept one's body as deeply unpredictable and, sometimes,

immutable—yet this is a fact rather than a failure, to be worked with philosophically and spiritually, rather than a cause for despair because a certain normalized trajectory is blocked. (Heyes, 129, 132)

Embodied movement can allow for enactments of disorientation, in part by allowing us to question our capacities for body control. We can feel disorientations when we practice actions that foreground the indeterminacy of what our bodies can handle (e.g., martial arts, parkour);²⁴ disorienting body movements can be liberating at the same time as they are difficult. As Diana Tietjens Meyers explains the promise of such practices for agents:

Individualized psycho-corporeal identities emerge and evolve as values take on flesh, memories are deposited in visceral sensation, skills become second nature, and knowledge is somatically stockpiled...A theory of emancipatory psycho-corporeal agency must also account for personal transformation, including how to purge the body of the pernicious meanings it has absorbed. (2004, 89)

Meyers has in mind examples like that of Brison, who took classes in self-defense after her attack (Meyers 2004, 85). When we enact disorientations through transformative movement, we can be working to strengthen ourselves by observing and asking questions about troubling habits or restrictions, or about possible alternatives.

²⁴ According to the American Parkour website, “Parkour is the physical discipline of training to overcome any obstacle within one's path by adapting one's movements to the environment. Parkour requires consistent, disciplined training with an emphasis on functional strength, physical conditioning, balance, creativity, fluidity, control, precision, spatial awareness, and looking beyond the traditional use of objects. Parkour movements typically include running, jumping, vaulting, climbing, balancing, and quadrupedal movement. Movements from other physical disciplines are often incorporated, but acrobatics or tricking alone do not constitute parkour. Parkour training focuses on safety, longevity, personal responsibility, and self-improvement. It discourages reckless behavior, showing off, and dangerous stunts. Parkour practitioners value community, humility, positive collaboration, sharing of knowledge, and the importance of play in human life, while demonstrating respect for all people, places, and spaces.” <<http://www.americanparkour.com/content/view/221/417/>> (Accessed February 5, 2011). For a compelling example of how empowering it can be for girls to learn parkour, see <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9Y4Q4r3bUQ>> (Accessed February 5, 2011).

Disorientations are unique in part because of their dual character: while they involve elements of unsettlement and feeling troubled, they can also involve feelings of piqued interest; while they can be shocking, they can also be surprising. Things that are exciting can hold our attention, even if they are also fraught with unsettlement; as Heyes' description of trigger poses shows, we can be motivated to *sit with* the effects of disorientation (or with ourselves as disoriented) for longer than we might be able to inhabit more exclusively bleak embodied feelings (e.g., pain or ache). A quality of felt disorientation that experiences of pain and ache typically fail to generate is the characteristics of curiosity or pleasure that can accompany our encounters with new, indeterminate, or mysterious experiences. When we cannot immediately recognize what we are experiencing or how the experiences are likely to change us in the future, we can be more likely to sustain involvement with them, and to that extent more likely to be changed. If we are motivated to allow for, sustain, or learn from challenging experiences that intrigue us, disoriented embodiments will be well suited to compel changed action as a result of them. Disorientations can allow us to be surprised at what our bodies can do – at their resilience, strength, self-reparative potential, stamina, and memory. As I consider in chapter five, these experiences of surprise can be important for moral agency insofar as, over time, we can become more willing to take *risks* in embodying responsibility, bolstered by past experiences of having survived, managed, or grown more readily than we anticipated—as in Minnie Bruce Pratt's case described in the next chapter, becoming aware of her capacities for endurance in her own life allows her to face the difficult political and moral tasks of anti-racist action without losing hope.

Some of most dramatic bodily transformations are described by authors who have undergone various forms of identity transition, including transitions of gender. The philosophical literature by trans authors and about transgendered experiences is substantial,²⁵ and my aim is not to write about trans lives from my own non-trans perspective. Rather, I want to highlight some of the complexities these authors elucidate in their analyses. Questions of disorientation are particularly alive in some accounts as processes of transition do not always involve feelings of having been oriented in whatever gender was first assigned, nor is it always the case that during or after transitions, genders are embodied as safe or comfortable identities. Gender transitions reflect how complexly we may embody identities, and how much felt orientation can rely on enacting gender legibly to others: ways of sitting and standing, habitual movements, voices, vocabularies, cosmetic and clothing styles, practices of touching, caring for, and holding other bodies may change to varying degrees during transitions, alongside any bio-chemical or physiological alterations that may be sought.

On the question of how knowledge informs changes in identity, I am thinking in particular of Alexis Shotwell's (2009) analysis of sensuous knowledge as non-propositional, a part of our lives involving somatic and affective experience: "a knowing that is both socially crafted and emerging from an experienced body" (Shotwell 2009, 65). I take up Shotwell's work at length in chapter four, so just mention her analysis here for its engagement with Eli Clare's powerful account of coming to live as queer and trans

²⁵ I have in mind particular descriptions in Nestle 2002, Shrage 2009, Heyes 2007, Halberstam 2005, Salamon 2006, 2010, and Valentine 2007. See also "Freshly Charles" video-logs about gender transition—I return to Charles' experience in the next chapter: <<http://www.youtube.com/user/freshlycharles>>.

(1999). Clare draws out how his own queerness becomes apparent to him only through complex social and environmental interaction. His discomfort in a body gendered ‘girl’ overlaps with the pleasures that open to him when sexual queerness becomes a live option. “We cannot ignore the body itself: the sensory, mostly non-verbal experience of our hearts and lungs, muscles and tendons, telling us and the world who we are” (Clare 1999, 129). Of course we can and do ignore the body itself and its sensuous knowledge, especially when paying attention to them threatens to motivate shifts in our performance of norms. But Clare’s felt disorientation, and particularly the tensions between new embodied pleasures becoming available and his history of childhood abuse and neglect, make his embodied knowledge of his gender and sexuality too important to ignore. Together, Clare and Shotwell flesh out an account of how knowledge gained through felt disorientation on the body can change not only Clare’s identity, but also the embodiments of those around him, and the worlds which mould gendered bodies themselves.

Experiences of disorientation are not always part of gender transitions, and when they are, they might be part of any stage of the process – assigned genders and ongoing processes of transition can lead to disorientation, and the non-ending struggle for accurate gender recognition can be a felt disorientation that stays. It might be that my account of the promise of embodied disorientation can support some descriptions of trans experience or resistance to/transgression of a strict gender binary, in part insofar as it can support resisting the view that gender reorientation is necessary or beneficial. In whatever slow ways transgendered identifications become increasingly available, such processes of self-transformation are in dynamic relation with community transformation. The hopefulness

of such disorientations is that while they do not always lead to ease, comfort, or clear paths of action into the future, they can lead to sensuous knowledge in individuals and more just social practices of gendering.

Processes of identity transformation are supported when other people accurately recognize who we are becoming—these processes highlight how disorientations can generate less individualistic, more relational modes of human being. As disoriented, we are more likely to stand out to others, as a result of the way disorientations make it harder for us to move smoothly or to pass unseen; while such visibility can make it even more uncomfortable to be disoriented, it can also be helpful for moral agency. Disorientations help me recognize the relational character of my situation when I become compelled to talk more explicitly about my motivations, when others need to help me act, and when the ways I act become more visible.

Insofar as efforts to identify and align identifications with embodied experience *can* be part of processes of acting ethically, relational support for some such efforts supports possibilities for moral agency, and relational resistance to them blocks the affective and corporeal processes (e.g., felt implicatedness) that in part allow individuals to become responsible. Theorizing the disorientations of identity transformation can therefore remind us of the importance of relationality for ethics: we can never do the disorienting work of identification without some relational support, and some of us might never be able to work toward more just practices of gendering, without the disorientations

of identification.²⁶ The hopefulness of such disorientations is that while they do not always lead to ease, comfort, or clear paths of action into the future, they can lead to sensuous knowledge in individuals and more just environments.

Disorientations can be triggered by traumas, illness, and oppression, and enacted through transformations of movement and identity. In some of the cases I outline, disorientations make us more sensitive to bodily vulnerabilities, more focused in prioritizing, more compelled by political urgency, more interested in learning from challenging embodiments, and more able to recognize the relational rather than individualistic nature of our agency. I detail the moral benefits of such processes further in chapter five. I turn now to fleshing out more comprehensive implications of felt disorientations for agency, charting the promise of disorientations for unsettling normative structures and undermining dualism.

3. Effects Of Corporeal Disorientations And Agency

Feeling disoriented can mean that what is appropriate to say, who is appropriate to touch, how it is appropriate to look and move, and what kinds of emotions are appropriate to express become more open questions – the social norms that have governed them are made questionable – we may come to question what we used to do, why we used to do it, and what we could change in the future. When we enact norms with relative ease, their

²⁶ We should not want all marginalized identities to become more easily enacted, of course; it becomes easier to enact a neo-nazi identity as neo-nazis become more able to find and encourage one another over the internet. My claim that some practices of marginalization can be beneficially unsettled by particular disorientations does not imply that all such practices *should* be unsettled.

presence goes unnoticed for as long as we experience no difficulty living within their structures. But like Heidegger's hammer, when norms either harm us or are no longer present to benefit or protect us, the structure of ease is threatened and we struggle to go on in the social world. Bodily experiences of disorientation help us recognize the contingency of norms especially when we sense variety in the normative structures of environments because we are responded to differently within them (e.g., as physician and therefore in control; as patient and therefore at the mercy of illness), or when we sense change in a given normative structure while we are in it (e.g., the structure of sexual violence and victimization changing in tangible ways with women's self-defense classes). Both kinds of experiences can be first or always only felt as strange or unsettled embodiment; we might recognize the contingency of norms in sensuous rather than propositional ways just by remembering a shift between feeling displaced in one life context and at ease in another.²⁷ By disrupting felt ease, disorientations can help highlight the ways in which my experiences of comfort depend (often tenuously) on my enactment of learned social norms that come easily to me. Recognizing the contingency (rather than naturalness) of norms softens their entrenchments by strengthening felt resolve or weakening felt entitlement. When we come to view our bodily habits as learned on the basis of norms, we might become able to better anticipate how to teach better norms or install guards on their becoming so rampant and unquestioned as to appear natural. When disorientations bring to the surface the norms buried in bodily habits, we become better able to see how we are implicated in enforcing those norms. Disruptions can be a particular help when the habits they disrupt are harmful in quiet ways. The power of disorientation to highlight the contingency of norms is especially

²⁷ This distinction drawn from Shotwell 2009, 58 n.1.

promising insofar as recognizing the contingency of one set of norms can make other sets questionable; for example, disrupting the necessity of norms that benefit or harm me because of my race can help show the contingency of those that benefit or harm me because of the ability-, sexual-, or gender-status of my body. The fact that disorientations can highlight the contingency of such norms does not mean that we always, typically, or easily get the chance to change them, especially if we find ourselves the only ones disoriented among a group of people who maintain norms by being easily oriented within them – but we can become more able to sustain subversive identities within and despite the norms, particularly if we find others who share our struggle.²⁸ Disorientation is an occasion for moral risk as well as moral possibility. I return to this point in chapters five and six.

Disorientations can also facilitate more explicit interrogation of harmful social norms. If it is correct to think that we become more able to challenge and change problematic social norms when they are made visible as *contingent* rather than natural features of our environments, disoriented embodiment can facilitate action against systematically harmful social norms by disrupting our enactments of them. Feeling only or easily *oriented* in my social world can be accompanied by feelings of invincibility, arrogance, or entitlement. When I am at ease in a social world for long periods of time, I may be less likely to be aware of who or what is made invisible, marginal, or ill at ease. When I take my ease for granted, I tend not to see the ease regularly denied to those around me. By disrupting felt ease, disorientations can help highlight the ways in which my experiences of ease depend (often tenuously) on my enactment of learned social

²⁸ For concrete accounts of shared struggle and resistance, see Card 1996, 42; Babbitt 2001, 99-129.

norms that come “naturally” to me. When I am easily oriented, complicated structures of social norms are mere background, unseen, though importantly in play. As Ahmed describes,

Comfort is a feeling that tends not to be consciously felt...Instead, you sink. When you don't sink, when you fidget and move around, then what is in the background becomes in front of you...Every experience I have had of pleasure and excitement about a world opening up has begun with such ordinary feelings of discomfort; of not quite fitting in a chair, or becoming unseated, of being left holding onto the ground. (Ahmed 2006, 154)

When my orientedness is disrupted, the contingency of norms becomes obvious and central, as was discussed earlier in Tronto's analysis of the ways my life is made easy by others working to care for me (1994, 101-124); norms become foregrounded especially when I find myself unable to enact them.

Feminist philosophers of embodiment have provided a crucial corrective to the dualist tradition of theorizing mind apart from body and mind as primary locus of moral agency: processes of cognition and emotion cannot be theorized apart from embodiment, and none of these processes can be left out of adequate theories of human agency. I claimed early on that disorientations are embodied experiences in the basic sense that all human experience is embodied experience, but here I want to push the point one step further: a particular strength of disorientations is that our *felt experiences* of them are compellingly anti-dualist. Disorientations can mediate the troubling effects of dualism. *Felt disorientation* has the important characteristic of muddying any tendencies we may

have to separate out cognition, from affect, from embodiment. Disorientation is likely not the only set of experiences to do so, but ‘felt anti-dualism’ is also not a feature of all our experiences. We have seen that such blurring does not immediately generate better possibilities for ethical action—it can itself be so overwhelming as to paralyze or dull our capacities to act. As Brison describes the months after her assault, “My mental state (typically, depression) felt physiological, like lead in my veins, while my physical state (frequently, incapacitation by fear and anxiety) was the incarnation of a cognitive and emotional paralysis resulting from shattered assumptions about my safety in the world” (Brison 2002, 44). The complication of experience does seem to be characteristic of being disoriented; even in those times when disorientations lead to feelings of *disembodiment* or withdrawal, they seem to do so as a result of (not before) the confusion of parts of our experience. Heyes puts the challenge to dualism in terms of concrete transformation:

Many Western philosophers implicitly believe that all cognitively significant experience happens in the head, and find the idea that emotions, memories, or patterns of behaviour are held in the body too vague or eccentric...but as I learned both technique (a form of discipline, to be sure) and to recognize and cultivate the feeling of lightness, I realized that my body could do things I had thought were foreclosed...Moving from heaviness to lightness in my body expands my range of possibilities and my capacities, and this expansion has had psychological consequences beyond turning myself upside down. (2007, 130)

What feminist philosophers of embodiment could think of as the particularly *anti-dualist* qualities of disorientation are important for ethics insofar as the promise of these qualities

aligns with what they have been claiming for years: theorizing a more complex felt agency (including the ambiguities around what is felt cognition, emotion, or embodiment) will do better justice both to the kinds of agents we are, and to the kind of (at least) human needs we might need to meet. In chapter five, I further theorize not only this direction of causation—how experiences of disorientation can motivate and strengthen responsible action—but also its reverse—how acting responsibly can be disorienting.

4. Conclusions

We experience disorientation as a complex spectrum of embodiments. My claim is not that we should create or encourage, for example, more traumas, more oppressive identifications, or more stringent resistance to self-transformations. Rather, seeing the disorientations that accompany these and other experiences as uniformly harmful neglects the multiple ways in which they may help us be better moral agents. Our experiences of transformation as a result of felt disorientation are often experiences of our bodies as more surprising, open, flexible, shaped by communities, or situated in the world than we had previously thought. While disrupted embodiment is not always helpful, neither is embodied disorientation always harmful—disorientations are most promising when they not only jostle, but also propel.

In the next chapter, I detail how felt disorientations have been positioned as a threat to moral agency in a different literature—philosophy of emotions. While the rehabilitation of emotions provided a crucial opening for philosophers to take more

seriously accounts of disrupted experience, the standard approaches to connecting emotions to agency have stressed emotion's intersection with *reason* rather than investigating how complex experiences like disorientation could be promising for agency, and not only when they are mediated by cognition.

Chapter Three: Affective Disorientation

Dolphins, I learned from J. William Worden of the Harvard Child Bereavement Study at Massachusetts General Hospital, had been observed refusing to eat after the death of a mate. Geese had been observed reacting to a death by flying and calling, searching until they themselves became disoriented and lost. Human beings, I read but did not need to learn, showed similar patterns of response. They searched. They stopped eating. They forgot to breathe.

(Joan Didion 2006, 46)

To feel emotion is to be involved in a situation which one is not managing to face and from which, nevertheless, one does not want to escape.

(Maurice Merleau-Ponty 2008, 99)

Disorientations are partly affective experiences. Even so, philosophical accounts of emotion tend not to discuss disorientation, perhaps reflecting tendencies to think of disorientations as being more pervasive, holistic, or all-encompassing than any single affect.²⁹ An adequate account of disorientation's promise for agency requires accounting for how disorientation is in part affective, and how affective disorientations can change action and agency. In this chapter, I examine affective experiences of disorientation, in order to consider how they can benefit the ethical agency of individuals and groups.

Affective disorientations are *experiences of unsettlement on an emotional level, involving*

²⁹ Philosophy of emotions has become a well-established field, involving rich intersections with fields of neuroscience, psychology, medicine, education, and fine arts, as well as philosophies of mind, embodiment, ethics, and politics. I do not survey all the major moves in philosophy of emotions here, although many, especially from the last 30 years, have made the project of tracking affective disorientation possible. The particular strains of philosophy of emotions that come up in the chapter are those that connect emotions to embodied experience, to rationality, to identity-expression, and to social or political participation. Overall, I limit my focus to charting the position of felt emotion in processes of developing and enacting moral agency. In particular, I aim to characterize experiences of affective disorientation, and situate such experiences in the context of those theorists who have focused on similar phenomena.

unclear, inharmonious, or non-habitual affective experiences, whose strongest effects are felt in the disruption of emotional processes and relational involvements. The affective characteristics of disorientations always overlap with what I am framing as the corporeal and epistemological dimensions of disoriented experience, which is to say only that my account of affective disorientation pays particular attention to the affective parts of disoriented experience, rather than to claim that disorientations are ever exclusively affective. Over the course of the chapter, I aim to challenge a pervasive tendency to think that when affects benefit agency they do so primarily by changing cognition. In chapter two I discussed how disorientations could mediate the troubling effects of dualism as feminists have contested it; in this chapter I am motivated in part by wanting to establish how affective disorientations' non-cognitive benefits for agency can help work against the tradition's over-emphasis on rationality.

I begin section one by presenting particular autobiographical examples of affective disorientation, which I draw on in order to characterize affective disorientations in section two. As in the last chapter, I am interested in how disorientations relate to affect in the two senses of always having affective dimensions (alongside corporeal and epistemological dimensions), and sometimes being triggered by disruptive affective shifts, like those involved in intense grief. In section three, I distinguish the function of affective disorientation in light of two streams of theorizing affective experience as supporting rational processes and political motivations, respectively. In section four, I take up the question of why affective disorientations might more commonly be seen as blocks to motivation than as themselves motivating. I trouble accounts which position

disorienting experiences as exclusively threatening rather than supporting moral agency. I show throughout how my analysis of disorientation interacts with and challenges select branches in philosophy of emotions, including recent moves to characterize affect as embodied, as part of rationality, and as directly generative of political awareness. I conclude by suggesting how affective disorientations, as I characterize them, can benefit moral agents by motivating action – and only part of that story is about changing the way we think.

My approach is motivated by Sue Campbell's call to adequacy:

Any adequate theory of emotions should account for the value of the variety of feelings that give meaning to people's lives...Such a theory must further address how what is of most significance to us, as expressed through our feelings, can either be successfully communicated to others or can be subject to suppression, distortion, and manipulation. (Campbell 1997, 3)³⁰

Adequately theorizing affective disorientations shows a surprising locus of moral promise—though perhaps more surprising in contexts of theory than in contexts of lived experience, given its neglect by theorists. My main project in this chapter is to clarify affective disorientations, as one part of my project of characterizing how disorientations can be promising for moral agency. I indicate wherever possible how the analysis of affective disorientation I provide might also prompt further efforts to make philosophy of emotions more nuanced in its representations of our complex emotional lives.

³⁰ I follow Campbell's use of terminology: "Feeling is, in common popular usage, a synonym for emotion, and this is the way I use the term here...I also use the words affect or affective to mark out my area of interest" (Campbell 1997, 10).

1. Cases Of Affective Disorientation

Affective disorientations are a spectrum of experiences felt on a particularly emotional level (or most often within the realm of experiences we are accustomed to describing as emotional/affective), which very often disrupt other emotional processes and the way we communicate emotions to and with others. Affective disorientations are likely to disrupt perceptions, thoughts, feelings, bodily changes, and dispositions. As I discuss them, felt disorientations can have particular effects in these realms by complicating or confusing various feelings and by altering the intensity or pace with which we feel them. Not all changes in our emotional lives are disruptive in this way. Three autobiographical accounts help ground my characterizations of affective disorientation throughout the chapter: an online video-log of ‘Freshly Charles’, Joan Didion’s book *The Year of Magical Thinking*, and Minnie Bruce Pratt’s article “Identity: Skin, Blood, Heart”. I begin by outlining the three cases here, before drawing out their particular experiences of affective disorientation.

A) Freshly Charles

Freshly Charles was mentioned in chapter two in the context of gender-transition and identity transformation: Charles has posted video-logs through experiences of F-to-M gender transition over the past two years, with most of the medical interventions taking

place in Philadelphia.³¹ In a vlog from November 9, 2009, Charles discusses being in a state of emotional confusion, not feeling able to identify or communicate emotional states. Charles starts the vlog by identifying an interest in emotions, against a background of an emotionally non-expressive family. Before starting therapy five years ago, Charles indicates having limited resources for identifying or describing emotions, but now identifies as emotionally self-aware and interested in pursuing emotional sensitivity within relationships, and “as somebody who is constantly trying to keep a finger on my emotional experience.” Against this background of emotional self-awareness, the purpose of this particular vlog is to identify recent difficulties in identifying, interpreting, and expressing emotional experience. Charles describes how emotional understanding that has historically been accessible has recently seemed to become opaque and distant. There remains some sense of feeling *something*, but the character of the feelings and the way they are felt in embodiment seem to have changed radically, so as to render them incomprehensible. Charles identifies feelings of worry around this: it’s clear enough that some feelings would be warranted by the current situation (unemployed, without permanent housing, struggling financially), but those feelings are not apparent in the way they have been in the past. Charles aims to bring out questions about how these kinds of shifts in emotional experience might be connected to the social and biological shifts of gender transition – and to see if those who follow the vlog have considered what kind of action might be called for, on the understanding that emotional awareness is an important part of personal and relational life.

³¹ I use the name ‘Charles’ here, which is the self-identification used in the vlogs and in personal correspondence, and I follow Charles’ preference for gender neutral pronouns. Charles has given me permission to use the vlog in this project.

B) Joan Didion

Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* is an autobiographical account of grief after the sudden death of the author's husband, John, in the context of the ongoing serious illness of her daughter, Quintana (who eventually also died at the age of 39, after the book was finished).³² Didion is a writer whose work and personal projects were closely intertwined with John's, also a writer. She describes the spatial and emotional proximity they established over years of sharing workspace, collaborating on professional projects, and raising a daughter. The book retells the story of Quintana's coma and hospitalization, with Didion, John, and their son-in-law struggling to manage the intense strain of the situation. In the midst of this heightened stress and emotional energy, John dies suddenly at the dining room table—Didion is left in shock and severe grief, with persistent concerns about her daughter's health. She describes the appearance of others in her kind of situation of turmoil:

People who have recently lost someone have a certain look, recognizable maybe only to those who have seen that look on their own faces. I have noticed it on my face and I notice it now on others. The look is one of extreme vulnerability, nakedness, openness. It is the look of someone who walks from the ophthalmologist's office into the bright daylight with dilated eyes, or of someone who wears glasses and is suddenly made to take them off. These people who have

³² I was cued to Didion in part by Genevieve Lloyd's interest in Didion's work: "Often, it is in states of dislocated consciousness—of shock or grief—that the deeper dislocations of our awareness of mortality become visible. Joan Didion, in her moving memoir of grief, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2006), talks of the jarring insight into collective irrationality that becomes visible in the aftermath of sudden bereavement. She recounts the shock of recognition of the falsity of the general assumption that death is something that can in principle always be averted" (Lloyd 2008, 266).

lost someone look naked because they think themselves invisible. (Didion 2006, 74-75)

Didion describes the year after John's death retrospectively, interspersing vivid memories with blurry recollections, efforts to survive in the face of her own devastation about Quintana's precarious health. She describes serious shifts in practices, patterns, and scope of emotional communication: she has until then led quite a private emotional life, keeping many things to herself and John, and is suddenly faced with more widespread public involvement and relational support than before. She describes new levels of emotional experience—deeper and more shocking emotions, and new sensitivities and confusions. Such experience occurs in contrast to the way so much of her life had been designed by her and John. As she explains the contrast and lack of control:

Many people I knew...believed absolutely in their own management skills. They believed absolutely in the power of the telephone numbers they had at their fingertips, the right doctor, the major donor, the person who could facilitate a favour at State or Justice...Yet I had always at some level apprehended, because I was born fearful, that some events in life would remain beyond my ability to control or manage them...*You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends.*

(Didion 2005, 98)

C) Minnie Bruce Pratt

Minnie Bruce Pratt's "Identity: Skin, Blood, Heart" explores shifts and struggles in her processes of growing up, marrying and having two sons, coming out as lesbian, and

pursuing political identification and activism. Pratt's story shows the complicated intersection between privilege and oppression – as a white, educated, Christian-raised woman, Pratt has benefitted from the protection of structures that harm others, while also experiencing systematic harm throughout her life, culminating in one major way when she lost her home and children for being lesbian. She becomes increasingly sensitive to her own implicatedness in the systematic harms she seeks to challenge and change. In a substantial overhaul of identity, simultaneous with the loss of custody of her sons, Pratt embodies affective disorientations. She discovers that “expressions I had thought to be exaggerations were true: if you are helpless with grief, you do, unthinkingly, wring your hands; you can have a need to touch someone that is like hunger, like thirst. The inner surface of my arms, my breasts, the muscles of my stomach were raw with the need to touch my children” (Pratt 1984, 27). After the loss of her community, children, and home, Pratt pursues intense political involvement and pays increasing attention to intersections of race, class and the history of privilege that enables her life and work. Throughout, Pratt emphasizes how multiple shifts in her social position, roles, responsibilities, power, safety, and identity cue emotional turbulence, sometimes sudden, and at other times sustained. Her experiences involve serious emotional volatility, and require significant efforts to process her emotions in ways that allow her to continue to function in work and relationships.

2. Characterizing Affective Disorientations

Affective disorientations importantly involve uncertainty about what our emotional experiences are, often because they are multiple, confusing, or because we are trying to trouble them and reposition or reinterpret them. Affective disorientations largely involve unexpected, uncomfortable, and unfamiliar emotions, sometimes triggered by shocking or surprising events. We can think of the spectrum of affective disruptions involved in a first kiss, a pet's death, or watching the looping video footage of New York on September 11th, 2001. Affective disorientations can involve shock or surprise, unease, unsettlement, discomfort, or feelings of being troubled. They can be felt as anxiety, restlessness, listlessness, or flailing. They can also be felt as pique, curiosity or flexibility. They do not take place apart from some degree of corporeal and epistemological disorientation. My characterization of 'affective disorientation' as experiences of unsettlement on an emotional level is subtly different in meaning from characterizations of 1) disorientation as an affect (on my view this would be too reductionist; affective experiences are only part of the experience of felt disorientation); 2) *disoriented* affect (i.e., regular affects, thrown off, and then perhaps reoriented); or 3) *disorienting* affect (where the affect might be settled enough, e.g., jealousy, but with disorienting effects on body or cognition). Affective disorientations can involve any of these aspects, but cannot be reduced to any of them.

Although affective disorientation has not been considered as such, philosophers have sometimes embedded one or more of these senses of disorientation in their discussions of emotion. One of the most interesting historical examples of this is found in John Dewey's 1894-95 characterization of emotion itself as disruption of habit.

Dewey's "Theory of Emotions" takes as given that emotions are in all cases responses to disrupted environment (e.g., encountering a bear in the woods), which are disorienting to smoothly functioning practices of rationality and embodiment, which he frames largely in terms of 'co-ordination'.³³ If in response to the disruption of emotional experience, agents do not coordinate into a definitive response to the shift in environment (e.g., running away from the bear, standing still), they experience what Dewey calls 'disco-ordination'/emotional seizure. As he explains,

There is the one phase of organic activity which constitutes the bear as object; there is the other which would attack it, or run away from it, or stand one's ground before it. If these two coordinate *without friction*, or if one immediately displaces the other, there is no emotional seizure. If they coexist, both pulling apart as complete in themselves and pulling together as parts of a new whole, there is great emotional excitement...Trembling marks, so far as I can see, simply this same disco-ordination on the side of the muscular system. It is the extreme of vacillating indecision; we start to do this, that, and the other thing, but each act falls athwart its predecessor. (Dewey 1895, 27; 1894, 565)

³³ Dewey explains emotional processes as follows: "Let some of the features of a situation habitually associated in the past with other features be present while these others fail, or let the ordinary proportion or relative strength of stimuli be changed, or let their mode of connection be reversed, and there is bound to be a disturbance...Reactions surge forth to some stimulus, or phase of a situation; the object appropriate to most of these, the factor necessary to coordinate all the rising discharges, is gone; and hence they interfere with one another—the expectation, or kinaesthetic image, is thrown back upon itself... All emotional attitudes whatever are idiopathic in the broad sense...All idiopathic discharges, possessing emotional quality, are in reality disturbances, defects, or alienations of the *adjusted* movements...They are cases of the disintegration of associations (co-ordinations) which are serviceable, or are the use of means under circumstances in which they are totally inappropriate" (Dewey 1894, 564, 559, 561).

So for Dewey, emotional experiences are in every case responses to disruptive shifts in environmental situation, and such experiences very often result in emotional seizure, where we become dis-co-ordinated, unable to respond definitively.

Dewey is an early touchstone for distinguishing my position on affective disorientation, particularly given the resonance between Dewey's terminology of co-ordination/disco-ordination and my language of orientation/disorientation, and given his characterization of emotional experience as embodied. The contrasts between our views are also informative. My account of how affect can disrupt habit is distinct from Dewey's, in particular as it relies on a major insight of the past decades in philosophy of emotions: contra Dewey, affect is very often part of well-functioning habit, agency, and ethics, and in ways which more commonly affirm and constitute than disrupt. Many of the theorists I draw from in this chapter explain why emotions are central to our flourishing as agents; as I will highlight, Ronald de Sousa in particular explains how disorientations help sustain rather than disrupt processes of rationality. We need a background understanding of how emotions support our lives most of the time if we are to understand my account of the promise of affective disorientations: affects are not primarily disorientations, as an account like Dewey's might lead us to think. Nevertheless when affective disorientations arise and disrupt habit, they can *help* us by unsettling troubling, entrenched habits, or by shaping possibilities for support through processes of changing habits. While Dewey holds that emotion is in every case disruptive of habit, I hold that only some kinds of emotional experiences are so disruptive, and affective disorientation is among them. Indeed, I think some emotional

experiences are not only not disruptive, but particularly settling for us, working to further settle us into habits and patterns of reflection. While Dewey understands emotional experience as fundamentally disruptive of rationality and agency, I agree with those since Dewey who have shown how affective experience can actually be necessary to the successful functioning of rationality and agency (especially De Sousa and Jaggar), and argue further that even disruptive affective experience can support processes of reason and action. While Dewey holds that the primary goal in response to the inevitable disorientation of emotional experience is to re-coordinate, I will argue in chapter seven that we sometimes respond best to disorientations of emotional experience by allowing them to change and inform us.

Characterizing affective disorientations requires in part understanding how they are *embodied*,³⁴ where the main task is to establish how affective disorientations intersect with corporeal disorientations without collapsing emotional experience into a sensation-based language of physiological experience. I find Peter Goldie's description of emotions helpful:

An emotion is complex in that it will typically involve many different elements: it involves episodes of emotional experience, including perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of various kinds, and bodily changes of various kinds; and it involves dispositions, including dispositions to experience further emotional episodes, to

³⁴ William James' pieces "What is an emotion?" and "The Physical basis of emotion" have been particularly important for taking up questions of embodiment and affect. As Campbell explains, "James' parallel claim in 'What is an Emotion?' is that by abstracting from the experience of fear all the sensations that accompany the movements that reputedly are the effect of fear, we are left with nothing we could call a feeling. Movement is essential to it. Without the bodily changes expressive of and consequent upon the perception of the bear, for example, the emotion of fear simply collapses into cognition...In so far as emotions fit into the explanation of action, they must have some special place that accommodates their bodily basis" (Campbell 1997, 28). My position is limited to a commitment about the claim that all felt disorientations are embodied – which isn't to say that all the affective experiences of disorientation are able to be best characterized in the language of corporeality.

have further thoughts and feelings, and to behave in certain ways. Emotions are episodic and dynamic, in that, over time, the elements can come and go, and wax and wane, depending on all sorts of factors, including the way in which the episodes and dispositions interweave and interact with each other and with other aspects of the person's life. (Goldie 2000, 13)

We do not experience disorientation apart from embodiment, and a theory of emotions which does justice in particular to the complexity of disruptive affects needs to account for how the affect of disorientation inevitably involves disrupted embodiment. Although affective disorientations are experienced in relation to corporeal disorientations, we cannot describe affective experiences purely in language of sensation. Philosophers have analysed such a reduction in the work of William James (1884; discussed in Campbell 1997, 23-31) and others; we find a more recent reduction in Jesse Prinz's *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotions* (2004).³⁵ Recent feminist approaches have been more holistic: Kym Maclaren argues for the embodiment of affect, locating emotions "not in some solipsistic consciousness, but in our embodied engagements with the world and with others" (Maclaren 2009, 26). And Diana Tietjens Meyers holds that, as one kind of emotional process, "affective bodily feelings are nonconceptual practical interpretations that intelligently guide action" (Meyers "Affect," 1).³⁶ The affect of disorientation,

³⁵ Prinz aims to dissect emotional experience by arguing that "emotion is quite literally a form of perception. This is consistent with the views of James, Lange, Damasio, and others who relate emotions to the body... Emotions are not merely perceptions of the body but also perceptions of our relations to the world" (Prinz 2004, 20). My intention is not to detail the complex relation between emotions and embodiment here. My arguments for the ethical promise of disorientations depend on characterizing the experiences of them as richly and clearly as possible, and they are likely to be consistent with various philosophical, psychological and neurological theories of emotion.

³⁶ Affects and embodiments of them do not always or obviously align; we present affects in bodily ways that might strike others as meaning something other than what we identify was our feeling, or we can clearly present in body an affect that remains unclear in our understanding. Mary Cappello depicts this subtlety: "[My friend] and I met at the base of a canyon where we ate crab cakes (one wondered where the

exemplified by feeling multiply pulled or completely untethered, is always experienced in body, and never without implications for our practices of knowing.³⁷

Philosophers have sometimes favored a dichotomy of ‘positive’ vs. ‘negative’ emotions, where particular affects fall into one category or the other, perhaps by virtue of the kind of experience they are, or the kind of effects they have: joy, contentment, and excitement would be positive, and sadness, anxiety, and dread negative. However, particular affects clearly complicate the binary: guilt, for example, might be pleasurable and unpredictable in its effects on social interactions. It is possible to leave the binary of positive and negative intact, while challenging the categorization of specific emotions into one camp or the other: the schema of categorization is itself vague,³⁸ and the division

crabs came from and how they got past the mountains) and drank iced tea as we teetered on plastic chairs set atop uneven terrain. He told me I seemed ‘serene’—or was it ‘at peace’—something that meant the opposite of anxious, and I considered—perhaps he’s right, or perhaps a general feeling of being anaesthetized presents as calm” (Cappello 2007, 191). Most interesting about Cappello’s situation is not only how intuitive it seems to move back and forth between descriptions of emotion and embodiment (i.e., from ‘serene’ seeming *embodiment*, to indication of non-anxious *affect*, to the very *bodily* suggestion of anaesthetic, back to the possible presentation of calm *affect*), but more how the embodiment of the emotion someone else identifies can highlight our own felt indeterminacy about the affect. Cappello’s affect is in dynamic relationship with her body-expression of it, which is itself in dynamic relation with her friend’s identification of it and her own response to this identification – situations where we feel such dynamism in the form of confusion or uncertainty can be good examples of affective disorientation.

³⁷ Although I draw on new examples in this chapter, it is helpful to note how affective disorientations can be triggered by the same kinds of experiences that triggered the embodied disorientations touched on in chapter two. Oppressions can trigger feelings of tension (e.g., as Du Bois felt in grieving his son), and feeling conflicted can often connect to feeling muddled, manipulated, confused, and overwhelmed. Illness can trigger feelings of being emotionally directionless, of not knowing how to feel, or even how I would *like* to feel about a given event. Here we might think back to Servan-Schreiber and Carel, examples of living with cancer and terminal illness. Both expressed concern about not knowing how they were or would want to be feeling. Should they feel angry? Grateful for their current lives? Why might some feelings (e.g., Servan-Schreiber’s sadness at being displaced from his professional identity) eclipse others in unexpected ways?

³⁸ These categories have aroused suspicion: are positive affects seen to be positive because they *endorse* something in the world? Because they are pleasurable? Because they lead to better social interaction? And are negative affects negative because they seem not to endorse anything, because they are unpleasurable, or because they are bad for social interaction? Are positive affects still positive when spurred by an action or event that has harmed someone? Are negative affects still negative when they help me or others in the world? Christine Tappolet (2010) highlights some of the vagueness around conceptions of what makes some emotions negative.

of positive and negative often oversimplifies important aspects and results of emotional experience.³⁹ In recent years, some feminist analyses have complicated the binary and highlighted how structures of power condition how we experience and express historically negative emotions. My claim is clearly that the experiences and effects of affective disorientations are not exclusively negative. The positive effects of affective disorientation can happen apart from us gaining a better knowledge of harm, harmer, or harmed. Neither the experiences nor the effects of affective disorientation support categorizing disorientation as ‘negative’; rather, affective disorientations, alongside many traditionally ‘negative’ affects, must be seen as complex. Having said this, my vision of affective disorientation relies more on deeper analyses of the relational, interactive, expressive, and power-infused aspects of affective experience.⁴⁰ In contexts of emotional responses to being wronged, for example, Campbell’s account of bitterness shows how the limited power of expressers shapes the kind of emotions they express. “Bitterness is publically formed rather than privately formed and then revealed to others. One way to characterize this collaboration is that the refusal to forgive and forget often is related to the failure of others to listen and act” (Campbell 1997, 168). Experiences of affective disorientation and the extents to which they can have positive effects relies on the social and ecological conditions within which they come to us. Some conditions more than others make it possible and liveable to experience, express, and receive uptake for expressions of affective disorientation. My position in environments and relationships

³⁹ As I read them, many of these accounts complicate understandings of ‘negative’ affects by focusing on the *effects* and their epistemological or practical benefits (i.e., directly benefitting the way we think, know, and act). Examples of such accounts include Jaggar’s account of outlaw emotions (1997), Meyers account of emotions and moral perception (1997), and McFall’s account of bitterness (1991).

⁴⁰ Examples of these kinds of analyses include Ahmed on fear (2004, 62-81); Ahmed on happiness (2010); Bartky (1990), Sedgwick (2003), Guenther (unpublished), Ahmed (2004, 103-106) and Shotwell (2007) on shame; Campbell on bitterness (1997, 167-172), Card on gratitude (1996, 118-139), Maclachlan on resentment (“Unreasonable resentments,” 2); and Spelman on anger and insubordination (1989).

conditions my possibilities for experiencing and expressing affective disorientations; these conditions are crucial, particularly because disorientation's promise can depend in part on my being able to experience and express disorientation with some degree of safety and security in my communities.

Affective disorientation sometimes involves not knowing what I am feeling.⁴¹ Often affective disorientation will involve attempts to determine what I am or should be feeling, sometimes with efforts to create distance between the complex affective disorientations themselves and our expressions of emotion. We might think for a moment of processes that caregivers sometimes employ with fussy infants (e.g., 'Are they hungry? Tired? Sick? Bored?'), or sometimes in less open-ended forms as a strategy to get older children to evaluate their desires (e.g., 'Do you want crackers? An apple? Some leftover rice? *Well then I guess you're not that hungry.*') Typically, those who are affectively disoriented are left without a clear sense of how to feel or act on the basis of feeling; such disorientations sometimes prompt us to employ one or both of these methods on ourselves (or in discussion of ourselves with others). Such a vision of affective disorientation links back to Goldie's description, where disrupted affect can involve disrupted perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and dispositions. So although I might not, for example, be able to clarify how I feel when my father remarries so soon after my mother has died, I might suggest possible feelings to myself (e.g., sadness? Anger?

⁴¹ Trauma survivors are often unskilled at identifying their own emotional states; part of post-traumatic treatment can involve exercises and literature aimed at expanding emotional vocabularies. See, for example, *Treating Survivors of Childhood Abuse: Psychotherapy for the Interrupted Life*. The not-knowing regarding affect overlaps with some of what I claim in chapter four: not knowing what we are feeling, why we are feeling it, or how we want to/should act on the basis of feeling can be pieces of the disruption involved in epistemological disorientations. Many other kinds of epistemological disorientations will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Relief?), while also trying to determine what kinds of emotions I want to present, and to whom (e.g., happiness to my father? Grief to my siblings?). If I get stuck on the question of how I feel, I might allow some openness and curiosity, thinking from past experiences or hypotheses about how I might go about characterizing my emotions; or I might not, either stopping the reflection by imposing an answer of the ‘not that hungry’ form: ‘If you can’t decide what you’re feeling, you must be fine’. Sometimes these disorientations can also motivate investigations that lead to noticing how my feelings resist standard categorization, as Brison does, for example, when she tries to make affective sense of simultaneous increase in startle response and lethargy (2002, 80-81). Affective disorientations are common, but not easily articulated in contexts that privilege self-awareness and wholeheartedness in processes of motivation and action.

I suggest that affective disorientations can be distinguished by three characteristics in particular: *felt indeterminacy*, *felt tension*, and *affective swell*. *Felt indeterminacy* involves feeling unsure of how to identify or express emotions, at some times because they seem unlike those experienced in the past, at others because we anticipate emotional responses that we are not in fact experiencing. *Felt tension* involves the unsettling experiences of interactions between emotions, themselves often indeterminate, which can feel like they are in conflict, muddying, or eclipsing each other. *Affective swell* involves dynamic intensity and pace of felt disorientation, where the complexities of feelings can expand and wane in waves that are in themselves disruptive, largely because of their potency and unpredictability. These three kinds of experiences often overlap in

experiences of affective disorientation, and together have important implications for processes of moral agency.

A) Felt Indeterminacy

Charles and Didion in particular illustrate one segment of affective disorientations: shifts in experienced emotion that make it difficult to identify, describe, or understand emotions. In Charles' case, experiences of felt indeterminacy stand out against expectations based on past experience, and in Didion's, experiences of indeterminacy align with the unprecedented character of her sudden loss and crisis. The indeterminacy of affective disorientations connects to Campbell's understanding of 'free-style emotions': "nuanced and nameless feelings that are neither reducible to sensations nor the sorts of states that are adequately captured by the categories of the classic emotions" (Campbell 1997, 71).⁴² For individuals who understand themselves to be, at least to some extent, emotionally intelligent, experiences of difficulty identifying or describing emotions can be deeply disorienting. Emotional intelligence can be characterized by capacities to recognize, describe, or challenge our emotions, and often by an underlying interest in paying attention to (rather than obscuring or avoiding) our emotions and those of others. Assuming that I have a certain degree of emotional intelligence, interest, or self-awareness, I might respond to certain circumstances with the thought that I *ought* to

⁴² In describing the mysterious affect of lovesickness, Diana Meyers identifies one way in which we can be affectively disoriented, and one way in which coming to terms with mysterious affect can help: "Mysterious affect prompts exploration and inquiry – that is, action aimed at unraveling the mystery – possibly culminating in innovation with respect to your personal direction, your interpersonal relations, or social reform – that is, action aimed at eliminating the constraints that cause the mystery. Although anomalous corporeal affect does not always supply feasible directives for action, it is often the key to coming to grips with practical problems." (Meyers "Affect", 5, 10)

be feeling something, judging either from a sense of normalcy (i.e., ‘anyone would feel scared after such an event’) or from memories of past experiences (i.e., ‘in similar situations in the past, I remember feeling angry’). My competence at recognizing certain kinds of emotions might be an important aspect of who I take myself to be, or what kind of relationships I take myself to be capable of having.

Referring to emotional intelligence and capacities for expression, Charles says, “I have put tons and tons of work into getting in touch with how I feel and being able to express that... it’s about being able to honestly articulate and talk about an emotional process, and specifically more difficult emotions around being afraid, angry, whatever.” There is an experience of feeling *something*, feeling it intensely, dynamically, or in a sustained way, and yet sensing a gap between the feeling and being able to identify what it is. Charles describes this kind of bewildering scenario, as triggered by a number of factors: having been on testosterone therapy for seven months, moving around a lot, having difficulty getting a nursing license, experiencing financial difficulties still to some extent related to the cost of top-surgery, and being involved in intense political identity work, partly through ongoing gender transition. Charles thinks that all these factors should be “destabilizing forces”, and anticipates experiencing some clear feelings in response to so much uncertainty and stress—the destabilizing forces should be stirring up fear—but describes the following:

I have been experiencing emotions in a different way... when I experience fear or anger, the sensation is different...I am experiencing the same feelings, but they are physically or biochemically playing out in a different way in my body, in different

parts of my body... My emotions are deeper in my core...I feel them in my gut, if that makes sense [pointing to stomach]...before, I think they were a bit closer to the surface [pointing to chest and head].

I read Charles as describing part of what I am terming affective disorientation: a feeling of slippery and indeterminate emotions, where their relation to triggers is confusing (i.e., the triggers would seem to point to a clear emotional reaction that is not happening now as it might have in the past), their connection with embodiment is unclear (i.e., they seem to be felt more in the gut than the head), and their implications for action are ambiguous. In Charles' case, questions about whether or where to establish permanent housing, with whom to pursue romantic interactions, and how to respond to difficulties securing a nursing license (and thereby employment), are all ones that, in the past, emotional self-awareness might have helped answer. Emotions are described more as possessions than experiences; with self-awareness disrupted, it is hard to go on. Charles' difficulty in identifying and expressing emotions is a strain on relationships, at very least limiting whether Charles can get needs met in engaging with others: "I have all this stuff to feel unsteady about and I don't really know how to describe to people, and therefore ask people for advice and help." Charles describes this affect as a whole as one of feeling "not at home." And the disruptions are deeply tied to identity: Charles identifies hormonal changes, gender identificatory work, and the financial burden of transition as being deeply involved. But Charles expresses complex affective disorientation rather than a simplistic reading of dysphoria as involving particular feelings, tying it not to the initial process of recognizing the need to transition, but to the actual process of transitioning.

Such indeterminacy is not characteristic only of major identity transitions, as in Charles' case, but also of major shifts in relationships, such as Didion's loss of John. She describes a state of radical shock and emotional indeterminacy on the night of his death; while she continued to function and appear to others as a 'cool customer', her disbelief and denial about such a sudden tragedy manifest in part as emotions that are not immediately identifiable. In retrospect, Didion describes confused feelings of calm and quiet determination: "I see now that my insistence on spending that first night alone was more complicated than it seemed, a primitive instinct...There was a level on which I believed that what had happened remained reversible. That was why I needed to be alone" (Didion 2005, 32). Didion's experience exemplifies Campbell's descriptions of how occasions of grief might often involve expressions of 'self-anxiety', which present as "restlessness, erratic motion, or the threat of confusion between dreaming and waking" (Campbell "Grief, Expectation, and the Unified Self," 3). Didion's felt indeterminacy continues throughout various stages after John's death and during Quintana's treatment, expressed in Didion's most intense periods as a stop or hold on feeling anything. Most of Didion's descriptions of affect during these times are drawn from multiple medical or academic accounts of *what grief feels like*. How indeterminate her feelings have been only comes into vision when immediate crises temporarily ease. Didion writes of a day a few months after John died and into Quintana's partial recovery:

I did not yet have the concentration to work but I could straighten my house, I could get on top of things, I could deal with my unopened mail. That I was only now beginning the process of mourning did not occur to me. Until now I had been

able only to grieve, not mourn. Grief was passive. Grief happened. Mourning, the act of dealing with grief, required attention. Until now there had been every urgent reason to obliterate any attention that might otherwise have been paid, banish the thought, bring fresh adrenaline to bear on the crisis of the day. (Didion 2005, 143)

Affective disorientation often involves emotional indeterminacy about what we are feeling, how we are feeling it, how it interacts with what we expect to feel, and how we should act on the basis of the feeling. Although in Charles' case, emotional indeterminacy in response to clear triggers is made worse against a background of having had clearer emotional experience in the past, emotional indeterminacy can in other circumstances be connected also to triggers which are indeterminate.⁴³ In every case, emotional indeterminacies are centrally characterized by emotional responses (to either known or unknown triggers) which are unfamiliar or difficult to identify, and by the struggle to identify how we are feeling apart from clear senses of how we should feel. The felt indeterminacy of affective disorientations is therefore often a struggle to experience *being moved*, partially without knowing *by or towards what*.

B) Felt Tension

In addition to emotional indeterminacy, affective disorientations can involve feelings of emotional tension—often the two are simultaneous. The felt tensions of affective

⁴³ Heidegger's account of the anxiety Dasein experiences in the face of its death is an example of where this kind of indeterminacy has shown up in the history of philosophy: such anxiety might be read as major disorientation in response to radical indeterminacy and can also *feel* indeterminate in ways which make it hard for Dasein to go on – the opposite of tranquility.

disorientations involve an unsettling lack of resonance among emotions. When we do not experience affective tension, our emotions may be multiple while seeming to resonate appropriately with each other. By contrast, felt tensions make it such that a dissonance underlies our emotions and complicates our experience of each. In combination with felt indeterminacy, we can feel unable to identify or anticipate our emotions, while at the same time experiencing felt conflict on an emotional level—such experiences are characteristic of affective disorientations. By ‘tension’ I mean something distinct from ambivalence, if we think of ambivalence as involving conflicting feelings of pull among at least somewhat clear options.⁴⁴ It is possible to feel the emotional tensions I am describing even if we can identify any of a number of possible simultaneous, unclear emotions. I might feel something like excitement at the same time as feeling something like dread and something like guilt – all might remain indeterminate, or my interpretations might change radically during my experience, and I can still experience emotional tension. Likewise, I might think I am feeling two or more emotions that need not conflict, and still feel a sense of underlying tension or dissonance. Affective disorientations are likely to involve experiences of one possible feeling being complicated by another, that one by another, and so on. Tension can be evidenced by experiences of emotions eclipsing each other: I might feel something like excitement, and then have that feeling temporarily eclipsed by fear or sadness, and so on. Such tension

⁴⁴ I discuss Frankfurt’s account of ambivalence in chapter four, given its more cognitive than affective structure and implications. Patricia Greenspan’s (1980) account of ‘mixed feelings’ is closer to what I mean, where we do not experience only one emotion at a time, but can instead experience multiple and sometimes conflicting emotions. I might feel happy when someone I love wins an award, at the same time as feeling disappointed that I lost it (a specific case of Greenspan’s more general example: 1980, 226); tender toward the family member I care for at the same time as feeling resentful that I bear so much of the work alone, and so on. Although ambivalence is framed more in terms of *conflicting* emotions than in terms of disorientation’s indeterminacy, tension, and swell, like my claims about affective disorientation, Greenspan argues that mixed feelings are in certain cases appropriate and useful.

might be well characterized by feeling ‘frenetic’ (involving feelings of frenzy, distraction, agitation, and experiencing feelings which seem to jerk around or dart here and there) or ‘off-kilter’ (out of balance, feeling ‘off’, unaligned). Felt tension reflects Dewey’s characterization of emotional seizure insofar as these tensions can also translate directly to processes of action: if I am feeling antsy or ‘all over the place’ it will likely be difficult to relate to my loved ones with feelings of ease or comfort. We do not need to have clarity about what particular feelings are or about why they might function in tension with each other in order to experience this aspect of affective disorientation.⁴⁵

Martha Nussbaum describes the felt tension of her mother’s last day alive:

During the transatlantic flight the next day, I saw, with hope, the image of health before me. But I also saw, and more frequently, the image of her death, and my body wanted to interpose itself before that image, to negate it. My blood wanted to move faster than the plane. With shaking hands I typed out paragraphs of a lecture on mercy, and the narrative understanding of criminal offenders. And I felt, all the while, a vague and powerful anger—at the doctors, for allowing this crisis to occur, at the flight attendants, for smiling at me as though everything were normal, and

⁴⁵ In an article focusing on *contempt* in situations of racism, David Haekwon Kim (1999) argues for the need for ‘emotion matrices’ which account for how emotions are produced in part by representing an agent’s interests or needs and the situations that affect those interests and needs. According to Kim, *emotional alloys* exist when one emotion, which is perhaps unconscious, is “fused with another emotion, the result of which may be an ambivalent overall affect at the level of consciousness. On other occasions, it may not be precisely conscious or unconscious, but have a ghostly background presence like the subdued sense of bodily posture when we read or drive” (1999, 114). He claims that “focus on the matrix is important because it gives us a framework for understanding the common phenomenon of blended or mixed emotions” (Kim 1999, 114). Kim’s account of blended emotions is much richer and more relevant for my account of affective disorientation than some others, for example the one offered by Prinz: “Blending occurs when two basic emotions are combined together. Examples may include contempt, exhilaration, and horror. Contempt may be a blend of anger and disgust. In principle, a blended emotion can be innate...If attachment is a basic emotion, and lust is a basic motivation, then love is a byproduct of two previously existing affective states” (Prinz 2004, 144-145).

above all, at myself for not having been able to stop this event from happening, or for not having been with her when it did. On arriving in Philadelphia I called the hospital's intensive care unit and was told by the nurse that my mother had died twenty minutes before...My body felt as if pierced by so many slivers of glass, fragmented, as if it had exploded and scattered in pieces round the room. I wept uncontrollably. An hour later I was on my way to my hotel, carrying my mother's red overnight bag with her clothes and the books I had given her to read in the hospital—strange relics that seemed to me not to belong to this world any more, as if they should have vanished with her life. (Nussbaum 2003, 233)

Nussbaum feels tension even among emotions which (from a distance or in retrospect) can be seen as compatible: hope, hurry, weakness, anger, pain, misery, and calm. When in the midst of affective disorientations, emotions which are in other situations compatible or even expected can feel impossibly out of sync. Grief notoriously involves confusing experiences: acute focus at the same time as uncharacteristic forgetfulness, hunger at the same time as refusal to eat, deep fatigue at the same time as insomnia, excitable energy at the same time as grim outlook, an impulse to run from a hospital room at the same time as incredible heaviness, relief and anger, celebration and pain, frustration at non-stop social contact and fear at the thought of being left alone.⁴⁶

Didion's narrative highlights the experiences of emotional tension on the night John died:

⁴⁶ Lloyd reads Augustine's grief as follows: "Augustine describes two major episodes of grief in the *Confessions*. First, in Book IV, he recounts his youthful response to the death of a friend...Because he lives outside himself, pouring out his soul 'like water upon sand' (IV, 8;79), the young Augustine experiences grief as a disorienting loss of self. He becomes a puzzle to himself—a stranger, tormented in his own country and finding even his own home 'a grotesque abode of misery'. Familiar places become unbearable in the experience of this new, strange absence for they no longer whisper 'Here he comes' as they would have, had he only been absent a while (IV, 4; 76)" (Lloyd 1993, 16).

I was trying to think what to do next when the phone rang. It was John's and my agent, Lynn Nesbit, a friend since I suppose the late sixties...she was calling from a taxi on her way to our apartment. At one level I was relieved (Lynn knew how to manage things, Lynn would know what it was that I was supposed to be doing) and at another I was bewildered: how could I deal at this moment with company? What would we do, would we sit in the living room with the syringes and the ECG electrodes and the blood still on the floor, should I rekindle what was left of the fire, would we have a drink, would she have eaten? Had I eaten? (Didion 2005, 30)

In addition to the felt tension of grief in embodiment— as in the desire to bolt from the bedside and the desire never to move again—grief as affective disorientation can also involve tension between our senses of the past and visions of the future.⁴⁷ Restlessness, then, as one expression of grief, is a push to move forward at the same time as uncertainty and hesitancy in my ability to do so.⁴⁸

We can be particularly prone to feel such tensions when confronted with once familiar or safe places coming to feel unfamiliar, as is often characteristic of disruptions or loss. Being in familiar settings can actually exaggerate the feelings of unsettlement

⁴⁷ Campbell highlights felt tension through the theme of disrupted expectations that are expressed as anxiety. The kind of self-anxiety Campbell is interested in is more like Heidegger's analysis of anxiety-in-the-face-of-my death than it is like a localized anxiety about an upcoming test or vaccination. The kind of anxiety most relevant for my purposes is like the anxiety that Campbell describes as shaking fundamental self-presence: "This notion of self-presence involves both expectancy and our relation to others. Grief raises, for me, the question of what it is in general to be expectant – what are the grounds for sustaining the expectations that are central to my ability to order experience?" (Campbell "Grief, Expectation, and the Unified Self," 1).

⁴⁸ Saying that the embodied feeling of grief is a 'pang in the breast' is a common characterization (Meyers "Affect", 4), yet seems not to do justice to the feelings of tension between such a pang and, for example, the felt need to appear strong, to not upset other family members around you, or to stand up straight in your job as pall-bearer. How the body *continues* to function in moments of intense emotional tension can strike us as surprising, as Merleau-Ponty describes: "When I am overcome by some grief and wholly given over to my distress, my eyes already stray in front of me, and are drawn, *despite everything*, to some shining object, and thereupon resume their autonomous existence" (Merleau-Ponty 2008, 97 italics added).

(e.g., everything about this place was so familiar, and my loved one and I spent so much time together here; now being in this familiar space is making my unfamiliar feelings of loss worse). The felt tension of familiarity and unfamiliarity of place is common, and it often translates into our embodiments becoming awkward and jerky in simple ways; we might forget our address as Didion describes, or forget how to unlock a door. As Campbell explains these phenomena, “Much of the world remains constant in grief, but what remains the same, the environment and memories of the mourner are not a source or locus of security but rather of doubt and anxiety” (Campbell “Grief, Expectation, and the Unified Self,” 8). Didion applies this, speaking of the ‘vortex’ that happens when she thinks too much about John or Quintana: “I saw immediately in Los Angeles that its potential for triggering this vortex effect could be controlled only by avoiding any venue I might associate with either Quintana or John. This would require ingenuity” (Didion 2005, 113). And Pratt describes the felt tension in spaces not so much complicated by grief as by a tension between past safety and ignorance and more current threats and political implication:

I lived in a kind of vertigo: a sensation of my body having no fixed place to be: the earth having opened, I was falling through space. I had had my home and my children taken away from me. I had set out to make a new home with other women, only to find that the very ground I was building on was the grave of the people my kin had killed, and that my foundation, my birth culture was mortared with blood...Because *I* was implicated in the doing of some of these injustices, and I held myself, and my people, responsible, what my expanded understanding meant was that I felt in a struggle with myself, *against* myself. (Pratt 1984, 35-36)

Pratt's feelings triggered by her complex and dynamic social position—and by her ethical implication—involve particular tensions between guilt, loss, threat, expansive reconnection, and these tensions play out within herself. The shift from felt familiarity to unfamiliarity, or from safety to danger can prompt affective tensions that are difficult to navigate and characteristic of affective disorientation.

C) Affective Swell

In addition to felt indeterminacy and felt tension, affective disorientations also characteristically involve what I want to describe as 'affective swell'. If indeterminacy refers to identifying individual emotions, and tension refers to their interaction, affective swell refers to their manner of coming upon and leaving us. The feelings involved in affective disorientation can be in this sense different in pace and intensity than more regulated, orienting emotions are; feeling disoriented on an emotional level can tend to swell and dissipate quickly and vividly, growing in intensity and rushing over us as waves of euphoria or illness sometimes do. 'Swell' conjures images of sound, surf, and physiology—images we will return to with Descartes in the next chapter. Disorientations swell in our affective experience by often involving feelings of being overpowered, surrounded, or engulfed by unsettlement, uncertainty, or possibility. The particular character of these swells can be disorienting if only insofar as they are less predictable or common than other affective experiences. The intensity or speed of felt disorientations is not always a surge we can (or should want to) take in stride.⁴⁹ As Didion describes the

⁴⁹ I am thinking here of a parallel experience of being picked up off the ocean floor and tossed a ways by Atlantic waves – these is something shocking about these experiences, something that knocks your breath

affective swells of grief: “Grief has no distance. Grief comes in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes and obliterate the dailiness of life” (Didion 2006, 27). The affective swell of disorientation is sensuous and unpredictable, and can disrupt or delay our other cognitive, emotional, and embodied processes.

Whereas a feeling of being *overwhelmed* seems to uniformly block processes of action or reflection, the affective swell of disorientation surfaces not only affective struggle, but also clarity or urgency of purpose or intention. Thinking of some experiences of affective disorientation as swell complicates straightforward categorization of affects, because feelings of swell can be pleasurable and exhilarating, as they are for Pratt, even when we cannot see them coming or hold other processes constant in their midst. As time goes on and Pratt’s political work and communities shift, she begins to describe the process of becoming more aware of privilege and implication in language of *swell*, as upheaval rather than catastrophe:

more like a snake shedding its skin than like death: the old constriction is sloughed off with difficulty, but there is an expansion: not a change in basic shape or color, but an expansion, some growth, and some reward for struggle and curiosity...We can experience this change as loss. Because it is: the old lies and ways of living, habitual, familiar, comfortable, fitting us like our skin, were *ours*. (Pratt 1984, 39)

The felt orientation of possessing and belonging within clear and innocent histories moves into the disorientation of losing the ease she once had.

off rhythm, threatens your security, and doesn’t let you immediately start swimming again. The rush of water holds and disrupts you, and it can be at the same time joyful and scary, depending on the size of the wave and your past experiences in the ocean.

The swells of affective disorientation are not always motivating: the *nausea* of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Roquentin* demonstrates a non-productive affective swell characteristic of major disorientation. *Roquentin* describes nausea in terms of body, affect, and agency:

Something has happened to me, I can't doubt it any more. It came as an illness does, not like an ordinary certainty, not like anything evident. It came cunningly, little by little; I felt a little strange, a little put out, that's all. Once established it never moved, it stayed quiet, and I was able to persuade myself that nothing was the matter with me, that it was a false alarm. And now, it's blossoming... I have never before had such a strong feeling that I was devoid of secret dimensions, confined within the limits of my body, from which airy thoughts float up like bubbles. I build memories with my present self. I am cast out, forsaken in the present: I vainly try to rejoin the past: I cannot escape...If I am not mistaken, if all the signs which have been amassed are precursors of a new overthrow in my life, well then I am terrified. It isn't that my life is rich, or weighty or precious. But I'm afraid of what will be born and take possession of me—and drag me—where? Shall I have to go off again, leaving my research, my book and everything else unfinished? Shall I awake in a few months, in a few years, broken, deceived, in the midst of new ruins? I would like to see the truth clearly before it is too late. (Sartre 1965, 11, 49, 13)

Robert Solomon reads *Nausea* as a “phenomenology of despair...Most of *Roquentin*'s descriptions of his experience are descriptions of disappointments, disillusionments, dissatisfactions, and regrets” (2006, 92, 81). The most important distinction between

Roquentin and Pratt for my purposes, is in what the affective swells of disorientation bring about – for Pratt, they compel vulnerability and questioning of self and society that leads to interdependence; for Roquentin, they compel calcification, and questioning of self that circles more and more narcissistically into isolation. Roquentin’s experience is compelling for many of us who are familiar with intense disorientations and felt insecurities, but his affective swells lead him to attempt a kind of *retrospective clarity* about exactly what happened *to him* through narrating a story *about himself* (Sartre 1965, 238). By contrast, as I explore further in the final sections of this chapter, Pratt’s swells lead her to attempt a kind of *forward-looking nuance* about what happened *to herself and others* through narrating stories about *collectivity*.

I have now detailed the experience of affective disorientation through three non-exhaustive elements: felt indeterminacy, felt tension, and affective swell. Charles, Pratt, and Didion express these as overlapping aspects of experiences of affective disorientation. Experienced together, these could lead to major affective tailspins. I turn now to characterizing the function of affective disorientations, before claiming that they can connect to motivation and action, sometimes in ways which benefit agency by slowing or disabling processes of reason, often in ways which promote or require interdependency.

3. The Function Of Affective Disorientations

Accounting for the promise of affective disorientations requires in part understanding how they, and emotions in general, can function to support our lives as agents. In this section, I give some background to my claim about the function of affective disorientations by considering two accounts of affective function: Ronald de Sousa's analysis of how emotions settle salience for us in processes of rationality, and Alison Jaggar's account of how specific emotions can raise awareness about unjust practices around us, particularly when we are members of groups harmed by them. Both de Sousa and Jaggar can be read as offering cognitive accounts of the function of emotion in specific epistemic and/or volitional processes. I draw on both accounts in order to clarify the function of affect in general, before claiming that experiences of affective disorientation can challenge both accounts: offering an additional view of function as an alternate to de Sousa's understanding of emotions as functional primarily when they *settle* salience, and troubling Jaggar's understanding of emotions as the most politically promising when we clearly recognize them and their objects. My claim is that while it is true that emotions can sometimes function to settle salience, and sometimes cue us to political awareness, to understand these as the sole or primary epistemological and moral functions of emotions is to neglect a whole category of affective experience which can benefit us as agents by *unsettling* salience and *not* by directly cueing us to political motivation.

A) Complicating Rational Salience

In the background of much of the literature that complicates strict categorization of ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ emotions are earlier analyses of emotions’ function. De Sousa establishes one important biological function of emotions: they help foreground the salience of certain aspects of our lives, helping us to better reason and act in light of what is most relevant. Having established his interest in a specific sense of ‘rationality,’⁵⁰ De Sousa argues for a view in which emotions work *for* rather than against processes of rationality, thereby working in support of processes of agency. In arguing for the role of emotions in settling salience, de Sousa’s specific claim is that “emotions spare us [motivational] paralysis...by controlling the salience of features of perception and reasoning; they temporarily mimic the informational encapsulation of perception and so circumscribe our practical and cognitive options” (de Sousa 1987, 172). Understanding emotions to be “in part patterns of attention” (de Sousa 1980, 141), de Sousa’s basic claim is that emotions make the importance of certain aspects of our lives or potential actions stand out against the background of less important ones – emotions settle salience – they direct our attention.⁵¹ Emotions should not be understood to settle only perceptual salience, but also as guiding what belief-desire combinations and decision procedures guide our action, as well as how particular objects and events come to be imbued with value.

⁵⁰ According to de Sousa, emotions are rational insofar as they “tell us things about the real world...[they] take up the slack in the rational determination of judgment and desire, by adjusting salience among objects of attention, lines of inquiry, and preferred inference patterns...their existence grounds the very possibility of rationality at [levels of judgment, perception, or desire]” (1987, 203). The kind of rationality I want to reject as the primary benefit of affective experience is De Sousa’s salience-settling variety – my arguments about disorientation as countering rationality in this sense do not necessarily apply to rationality in other senses. De Sousa thinks that emotions settle salience, which promotes rationality, and is thereby good for agency. I think that emotions (like those involved in disorientations) can unsettle salience, disrupting rationality in de Sousa’s sense, and still be good for agency.

⁵¹ Robert Solomon agrees with de Sousa’s highlighting of the importance of emotions for salience, focusing on what he calls “important neurological evidence for the thesis...that emotions and rationality are not opposed but complementary and intertwined” (Solomon 2007, 36).

Analysing disorientation in light of de Sousa' account, we notice that affective disorientation often *disrupts rather than settles processes of establishing salience*. It does not always: we considered in chapter one the example of the patient with brain cancer, for whom priorities to care for others (e.g., the older woman getting into her car) become clearer rather than more distant – we can see that in some cases disorientations work to make some objects stand out as more salient than others in particular contexts. Disorientations may help settle salience by spurring drastic changes in attention – perhaps indirectly by unsettling the salience of other things we thought we cared about. But for the most part, affective disorientation dislodges rather than directs attentional salience. Disorientations shake processes of establishing salience: we struggle to recognize which parts of our identities, objects in the world, events, or people are most salient. Our goals and efforts become clouded. Triggered by the end of a long-term relationship, affective disorientations may unsettle the salience of a number of areas of one's life that structured previous reasons to act or not act (e.g., geographical commitments, friendships, sleep patterns, etc.). De Sousa partially accounts for a mechanism that takes over when emotions fail to direct salience in a footnote: “Since emotions also sometimes conflict, other tools of rationality may be brought in to determine the issue in those sorts of conflict” (1987, 200), but he does not consider what the effects of disrupted salience may be.

My account of affective disorientation is supported by de Sousa's arguments in favour of emotions as things which function within processes of agency, but offers an

example of an affect that sometimes challenges straightforward processes of reason while simultaneously supporting processes of agency. The primary use of affective disorientation is not always in helping us carry out rational processes in de Sousa's sense, and affective disorientations can disrupt or delay processes by which we reflect upon preferences, determine reasonable means by which to meet ends, and decide on paths of action. A serious collapse of reason will of course temper how much these disorientation may benefit us. The benefits of disorientation are multiple, as I summarize them in the last sections. Philosophers of emotion need to focus further on the benefits of emotional processes for agency, apart from what they can do to support the rationality of agents. Affective disorientation is a good case to focus on insofar as it can benefit us even when it fails to support processes of rationality, or actively disrupts them.

B) Complicating Political Awareness

While de Sousa focuses on a general function of emotions in generating or settling salience in rational processes, Alison Jaggar establishes a more explicitly political account of what particular 'outlaw emotions' can do. According to Jaggar, "Outlaw emotions are distinguished by their incompatibility with the dominant perceptions and values, and some, though certainly not all, of these outlaw emotions are potentially or actually feminist emotions" (Jaggar 1997, 396-397).⁵² Paradigm cases of outlaw emotions involve affective experiences of marginalized individuals in response to particular expressions of dominance; Jaggar gives examples of how "people of color are

⁵² For helpful responses to Jaggar's thesis see Meyers 1997, 204-208, Scheman 1996, 229-230, and Campbell 1997, 160-162). For work on contempt in particular, see Bell 2005 and Mason 2003.

more likely to experience anger than amusement when a racist joke is recounted, and women subjected to male sexual banter are less likely to be flattered than uncomfortable or even afraid” (Jaggar 1997, 396). According to Jaggar, outlaw emotions are primarily epistemic resources, which can function to help provide politically subversive stances by supporting unconventional perceptions of our social worlds and their normative structures. Jaggar holds that some outlaw emotions are “necessary to developing a critical perspective on the world,” particularly insofar as they can motivate new theoretical investigations in and of the world and enable unconventional perceptions of it, such that we can “bring to consciousness our ‘gut-level’ awareness that we are in a situation of coercion, cruelty, or injustice” (Jaggar 1997, 397).

Affective disorientations are distinct from outlaw emotions in one way insofar as disorientation often does not readily indicate to us a fault or problematic dominance in the world. While Jaggar attempts to account for how anger or revulsion can highlight oppression or structural injustice, disorientation can be experienced not first or chiefly as something that points to a problem in the world. It may be that Jaggar’s claim to how powerful outlaw emotions can be – getting us all the way to an awareness of problematic dominance or fault – is actually overstating what emotions like anger can do.⁵³ That is, how often or reliably outlaw emotions can help marginalized individuals make that jump

⁵³ Meyers might be making Jaggar’s account out to be less reliant on distinct emotional clarity than it in fact is: “Alison Jaggar’s well known account of “outlaw emotions” militates in favor of the opposite conclusion. Outlaw emotions are a kind of mystery affect. They seem inappropriate because they are stirred by unjust treatment that is not yet deemed to be unjust (Jaggar 1997). Outlaw affect gnaws at you, disconcerts you, and may ultimately lead to social analysis and resistance. Anger, embarrassment, anxiety, and frustration, all of which have powerful corporeal components, often serve as vehicles for this kind of social critique. Thus, Jaggar’s epistemology of dissent relies on the capacity of the affective body to know more than the rational intellect” (Meyers “Affect,” 9-10).

so directly is unclear on Jaggar's account. My claim about the political function of affective disorientation is in any case more modest than Jaggar's about outlaw emotions: disorientations may point to deep uncertainties in ourselves and/or our world. As I establish in chapter six, from those uncertainties politically fruitful work can follow.

Disorientation can be so disruptive in part because it rarely seems to us to be the direct result of oppression or harm (e.g., the disorientation of becoming queer might not immediately strike us as a result of heterosexism, although without heterosexism, queerness might not be so disorienting). Disorientation is neither easily interpreted as the result of structural injustice, nor does my being disoriented always signify that I am struggling to live out a promising subversion in oppressive territory; for example, I can be disoriented because I persist in trying to oppress in a community that calls me on my actions. Disorientation is further distinct from outlaw emotions given its involvement of the body. Jaggar's suggestion that outlaw emotions can bring gut-level awareness to consciousness is rich and complex though it requires further exploration: we need to understand further what gut-level awarenesses are, how they are felt on the body, and how they might be sensitive to justice and injustice, while guarding against falling into the trap of reducing emotions to bodily sensations. Nevertheless, my account aims to push the question of bodily involvement in a different direction: how can disorientations be felt as a *lack* of gut-level awareness? How might the indeterminacy of such felt disorientations be at times a step towards recognizing and changing oppressive practices, without (as outlaw emotions are said to) immediately indicating to us what or where those practices are?

Whereas outlaw emotions seem to draw our attention to awareness we have but have been taught to ignore, I consider how disorientations can involve deep confusion about ethics, risk, and what we think is good for us as individuals and communities. In de Sousa's terms, the salience of particular actions is often unsettled. Disorientation is distinct in a final way from outlaw emotion insofar as disorientation, unlike outlaw emotions, challenges rather than relies on dominant categories of emotion. Sara Ahmed's account of queer feelings (Ahmed 2004) establishes how disorientation assumes and requires non-homogenous communities with diverse and dynamic affective categories, so that queer feelings (i.e., our feelings of being out of place, of being uncomfortable in specific situations or embodiments) work to challenge and re-challenge established emotion categories. While agreeing with Jaggar's rich analysis of the subversive power of emotions in helping us work toward projects of social justice, my analysis of disorientation follows Campbell's call (1997, 160-164) for making more central the affective diversity of communities, and the importance of revisionary affective experiences or categories.

Near the end of chapter two, I claimed that corporeal disorientations can help us recognize the contingency of norms, often even those which have directly shaped our experience for a long time. It is true that recognizing the contingency of norms can be part of our becoming able to create less harmful ones, but this is not likely to be a direct process from feeling, for example, afraid, to understanding myself as systematically harmed. We may be more likely to notice the contingency of norms before we notice the

harms norms are perpetuating, and it is more likely that the process of recognizing contingency will be slow and confusing than immediately motivating of anti-oppressive awareness and action.

I agree with the claims of both de Sousa and Jaggar that emotions can function to support agency. Whereas de Sousa claims emotions support agency by settling salience and thus supporting rational processes, I am claiming that affective disorientation can support agency even or particularly when it disrupts salience. And whereas Jaggar claims that outlaw emotions support agency by serving as emotional cues to injustice (or actual insights into injustice), I am claiming that affective disorientations can support agency even or particularly when they do not cue us so much to a determinate conclusion about the world (e.g., that it is unjust in a particular way and we should act against it), as to indeterminacies and confusions about our own experience and how we should act.

4. Affective Disorientation And Agency

Affective disorientations are not always useful. As in cases described in chapter two, disorientations do not always support our processes of agency, particularly when our social environments do not allow them to do so – and they are regularly categorized as part of disordered rather than thriving affective lives. Aspects of disorientations can cause problems for moral agency: the anger that can accompany affective dimensions of disorientation can lead to violence, and their overwhelming character can lead to complacency. To challenge understandings of affective disorientations as inevitably

harmful for agency, I evaluate Cheshire Calhoun's account of affective disorders like depression. Calhoun's are some of the most compelling arguments against the productivity of affective disorders, and I aim to clarify where my position offers fine-grained suggestions about the possible promise of emotional disruption. I then move on to discuss how affective disorientations can be part of a well-functioning emotional life, especially when we understand strengthened capacities for agency to be one indicator of such function. Throughout the chapter, I have been committed to understanding agency as potentially benefitted even (or sometimes especially) when processes of desire-ordering and salience-settling are disrupted—here, that commitment becomes particularly important.

A) Disorientation And Blocks To Agency

Serious affective disorientations can be deeply disruptive, preventing us from acting, if only because our strength can be sapped just by trying to pay attention to the lack or seeming cacophony of feelings while at the same time functioning as we usually do in casual social interaction and self-care. We might understand affective disorientations to be at least partially caused by affective disorder: for example, if Charles is facing indeterminacy of emotional state, perhaps dysphoria is the chief cause, in which case the dysphoria should be treated in part in order to restore affective function. If Didion's grief persists such that her affective tension continues beyond a timeframe that seems acceptable, perhaps a major depression is the chief cause, in which case the depression should be treated in part to restore affective function. If I commonly experience affective

swell, rushes of dynamic and unexpected emotions, which make it hard to continue regular interaction in my social, high-stress workplace, perhaps an anxiety disorder is the chief cause, in which case it should be treated, and so on. I am not meaning to trivialize psychological and psychiatric approaches; practicing therapists regularly recognize and treat according to the *health* of some forms of grief and emotional upheaval. Even so, some troubling diagnostic patterns of thinking categorize affective disorientation as a symptom of a locatable affective disorder that can be treated by psychological or psychiatric therapy and is best done away with, as quickly and permanently as possible. In such cases, affective disorientations are framed as part of affective disorder or dysfunction, and thereby the experiences of them positioned as most likely detrimental to mental health, processes of rationality, and moral competence.

Cheshire Calhoun argues that in order to be motivated to act, a “set of ‘background frames’ of agency” must be in place. These frames include “a perception of our lives as meaningful, lack of estrangement from one’s own normative outlook, a belief in the effectiveness of instrumental reasoning, and confidence in our relative security from disastrous misfortune” (Calhoun 2008, 206). According to Calhoun, experiences of depression and other affective disorders can severely disrupt these background frames (Calhoun 2008, 194, 198). The result of disrupting such background frames is “an estrangement from one’s normative outlook that drains one’s own reasons of motivational force; and to the extent that deliberation and action are still possible, deliberating and acting feel like impersonating an agent rather than being one” (Calhoun 2008, 204). She argues that depression can be experienced as a particular ‘paralysis of

the will', through an acquired helplessness in the face of what seem like inescapable hardships. As she explains, "What paralyzes the will is the *uncontrollability* of one's circumstances and, thus, the ineffectiveness of one's instrumental reasoning.

Demoralized depression registers the practical inefficacy of agency and thus the pointlessness of engaging in deliberation" (Calhoun 2008, 205). Serious affective dysfunction, in Calhoun's terms, has the potential to so deeply disrupt our fundamental senses of our affects and social worlds as reliable and secure that our capacities for agency are threatened or harmed. In Peggy DesAutels' terms, affective dysfunction can lead to "moral oblivion", where we are "completely or mostly unaware of a moral demand being made" (DesAutels 2004, 73). As she explains, "It is difficult to see moral features in our environment when these features are filtered by certain emotional states and disorders. We filter aspects of our experience when we are angry, deeply depressed, anxious, elated, bored, and so on...emotional states are just one more potential cause for our being morally oblivious and thus unresponsive" (DesAutels 2004, 75). Calhoun is right to give nuance to the ways in which experiences of affective struggle, and depressions in particular, are very often detrimental to agency.

Although I am more interested in this chapter in how affective disorientations can benefit agency even when they do not make for better processes of reflection or rationality, it helps to note that affective disorientations *can* benefit us in part by spurring self-reflection: disorientations can prompt me to think about and question my identity and my responsibilities. Having said this, my main focus is elsewhere: by *disrupting* salience, affective disorientations can make room for new commitments or relational

dependences, distance us to allow critical reflection on old ones, show the fragility of our processes of determining salience, and thereby potentially loosen our grip on commitments, or make us realize that we can function well even in cases of affective insecurity, largely because of social networks that help us continue to act and identify. I am not romanticizing mental illness: affective disorientations, when they are severe enough to cause affective struggle and mental illness can be unbearably difficult, and when they are bearable, they can weaken rather than strengthen agents. Although disorientation should not itself be categorized as mental illness, when disorientation correlates with experiences of depression or other psychosocial disorders, it can be part of the pathology. But one of my points about agency is that, in some cases, experiences of weakness can ultimately make for more capable agents.⁵⁴

Calhoun highlights cases where demoralization and depression lead for the most part to social isolation.⁵⁵ These cases certainly exist, and sometimes affective disorientations can be isolating (e.g. Roquentin's case). Often, though, affective disorientations prompt either relationality, spurring us to communicate or engage with others in the world (e.g., Charles and Didion's cases), or distance, compelling us to take time away from communities and environments that are not meeting our needs (e.g., Pratt's case). Affective disorientations can *distance* us from certain others, commitments,

⁵⁴ Mine is just one approach to re-evaluating the potential promise of affective struggle; others tend to argue more from the perspective of disordered experience and towards rational processes than I do. Although its theoretical structure is for the most part more clinical than my consideration here, the 'Daseinanalysis' movement established at the intersection of Heideggerian understandings of mood being in the world and Freudian psycholanalysis (see Boss 1963, Binswanger 1975) has an interesting take on these kind of strategies. The 'daseinanalytic why not?' "is a question which is often asked in place of the usual analytic 'why?'" (Boss 1963, 248-251), the idea being that while "why" can confront a patient with the need to justify herself, "why not" can open a space on both sides of an action, for thinking both of origins of motivation and possibilities for present and future enactment and change.

⁵⁵ Calhoun discusses the character of 'Laura' from *The Hours*, a clear case of isolation.

or identifications without being isolating: certain distances are prerequisites for subversions or political change, particularly when it affords us distance from too insular a social group.⁵⁶ So although Calhoun is right to claim that, “When the background frame of confidence in the hospitality of the world to ongoing human agency is disrupted, one may lose the sense that deliberation has a point,” (Calhoun 2008, 206), she neglects how one may also gain interest in and possibilities for making the world more hospitable.⁵⁷ Peggy DesAutels is right to think that some emotional states, such as severe depression, can direct our attention in ways which can make us morally oblivious (DesAutels 2004). But another major cause of moral oblivion – our habitual engagement in mindless routines – is also very often shaken up by disorientations, particularly as they often make it difficult for us to go on in our everyday lives. I take up the moral import of these experiences further in chapter five.

B) Disorientation And Motivation

Affect plays complex and sometimes unexpected roles in motivation, even when our affects themselves are not pleasurable or clear to us, and when their effects are not

⁵⁶ There are many examples of the social benefit of deliberate retreat, particularly in multiple coming-of-age rituals.

⁵⁷ The complexities around social privilege and experiences of disorientation raised in chapter two are true on affective levels as well: the likelihood that affective disorientations will be part of underlying affective dysfunction is greater the more likely we are to experience ongoing mental illness and affective dysfunction overall, which will vary in complicated relationship to social and economic privilege. Although it may be true that more social privilege means more resources to devote to maintaining psychological and affective well-being (e.g., to protecting privacy and social distance for reflection and self-care), it's not so easy as understanding affective disorientations as more likely to benefit us the more socially privileged we are. The factors which make affective disorientations beneficial involve complex intersections of embodiment, personality, resources, trends in psychological diagnosis, and so on, and access gained by social privilege does not always secure contexts that allow affective disorientations to be viewed or experienced as positive (e.g., too much distance can lead to isolation, which is unlikely to be good for disoriented individuals over long periods of time).

primarily on cognition. As is clarified by Jaggar and some of the theorists who complicate negative affect, less pleasurable affects can be motivating *indirectly*, by cueing us to the need to change an injustice, intervene in a harmful situation, or remove ourselves from certain patterns of action. Indeterminate affects, like affective disorientations, are likely to provide pause, concern, or interest, directing, disrupting, or confusing attention, slowing action, and disrupting automatic behaviour. As such, the motivation they can provide is likely from a complex process of unsettling – sometimes motivating us to question, undo, or disengage, at other times motivating us to appreciate and sustain parts of our social worlds.

Affective disorientations can create simultaneously a need and opportunity for a shift in ways of understanding and acting within communities. The felt indeterminacy of Charles' affective disorientation motivates curiosity, relational involvement, and renewed commitment to social interaction based on open emotional engagement. As they did in both Charles' and Didion's case, affective disorientations can prompt us to rely on others to help shape our visions of who we are in periods of transition, crisis, or loss. The felt tension of Didion's affective disorientation motivates creative approaches to negotiating diverse needs and demands, particularly surrounding the after effects of her husband's death, and her daughter's ongoing illness. The felt swell of Pratt's affective disorientations can motivate strategies for responding to intense demands without violence, explosiveness, or abandonment. Pratt makes clear the effects of affective swell in particular by characterizing their opposites: restrictiveness, narrowness, and the feeling

of being closed-in. The swell she ties to perpetually disorienting political agency, the restrictiveness she ties to inaction:

When I passively witness the repetition of the old ways of doing things, and do nothing, I feel my rigid circle close around me, tightening, painful: I feel myself closing into a narrow world, away from the friendships and the creative possibilities of a place where diverse women live. In my inertia and ignorance, I do not always speak or act: when I do, there is fear, but also the exhilaration of going forward toward that place. (Pratt 1984, 52)

Pratt makes more explicit than Charles or Didion does how the expansiveness of affective disorientations can provide momentum. Pratt also exemplifies how temporary distancing from some aspects of her community of origin allows for her to experience and express affective disorientations, and partly through them to return to aspects of her communities to rebuild. As she describes it, Pratt's path of experiencing affect takes time, patience, and struggle—which resonates with an interpretation of affective disorientations as experiences to sit with rather than rush through. Her experience makes clear that when affectively disoriented the goal should not be to return to more pleasurable affective states as quickly or straightforwardly as possible.

Affective disorientation's effects can create spatial distance between us and environments that are uncondusive to our well being. For example, if I experience intense affective unsettlement whenever around a particular community or within a particular geography, my disorientation might compel me or others to dissociate from that context. Affective disorientation can also create temporal distance, giving us some

time away from further emotional strain, and giving us and/or others time to heal from past wrongs and reflect on better patterns of action. Such space can be created when we move into healthy ‘conservation modes’ as a result of serious disorientations, where we pare down our actions and interactions and make efforts to conserve emotional and physical energy. A suggestion that affective disorientation might be morally beneficial insofar as it can provide physical or temporal distance is dependent on an understanding of social repair as in some cases the first step toward more ethical norms and communities of action (e.g., in Pratt’s case of—temporary—removal from some members of her communities of origin, or in pursuing some periods of partial retreat with the intent of returning and rebuilding). The way others interact with me can be paused or shifted enough that we together can create new ways of interacting that do better justice to the kind of agent I can and want to be. Old patterns may have limited my agency, particularly when they constrain me as too incompetent, childish, selfish, or eccentric to be entrusted with responsibilities. Affective disorientations can spur *social breaks* that can carve out space for new patterns of interaction. As I return to the point in chapters five and six, the disorientations which spur such breaks are more likely to result in moral shifts the more communities understand that dynamic social involvements, where norms are open to change, can be promising.

We can see from Charles, Didion, and Pratt how affective disorientations can spur us to forge new ways of relating to and depending on the insights of others. It’s not that disorientations make levels of social life easier. As Didion describes her situation:

I notice that I have lost the skills for ordinary social encounters, however undeveloped those skills may have been, that I had a year ago. During the Republican convention I was invited to a small party at a friend's apartment. I was happy to see the friend and was happy to see her father, who was the reason for the party, but I found conversation with others difficult...I hear myself trying to make an effort and failing. I notice that I get up from dinner too abruptly. (Didion 2005, 213)

Affective disorientations tend to strengthen aspects of certain relationships by making us lean on them more heavily. Affective disorientations can also importantly spur *communication*. As in the cases of Charles and Didion, feeling affectively disoriented can prompt us to communicate more with others, as we seek their help in making our situations more bearable, or as we ask them to situate a strange feeling for us in the context of their own experience. In certain cases, affective disorientations can thus prompt relationality rather than isolation. Contra Calhoun's position, agentic capacities might be benefitted *especially* in the face of what seems like uncontrollability of circumstance and affect, which can (though they do not always) prompt us to seek out more communication and relational involvement.

Although I think that in many cases affective disorientations motivate more relational selfhood, this alone does not show that more relational selfhood is good for us or morally motivating. In fact, the lived ways in which disorientations can spur more relational interdependence and can require that we act in more relational ways are not always good for us. More relationality is not good for us in experience or practice when,

for example, the matrix of relationships in which we are located harm, oppress, or limit us from accessing better relations. According to the feminist philosophical perspective I endorse, relationality is in every case a condition of our identification and action, one which we cannot live without, and if I fail to understand this, or naively understand myself to be outside or beyond the reach of it, I am not only in denial, but also in danger. It follows that if philosophers of agency fail to build a sufficiently rich account of relationality into their analyses, they fail to provide analyses which can resonate with or make sense of human experience and action. It is conceivable that more relationality will be good for me in one area of life (e.g., by bringing me into closer interdependence with trustworthy people who care for me), while at the same time opening me up to potential harm in another (e.g., making me more vulnerable to structures of power that can jeopardize my job-security), and that both of these can coincide with me gaining more awareness of the extent and depth of my relational dependence itself. My claims about how affective disorientation can spur greater relationality need to reflect these complexities: if it's true that disorientations tend to spur both more relationality and more awareness of relationality, then work still needs to be done to show how these can promote as well as threaten moral agency. I take up that discussion in chapter five.

Perhaps not surprisingly, when Charles reaches out in communication or when Didion takes up the project of public emotional expression (even retrospectively), in part in hopes of making their own situations more bearable, they actually function to allow those others who watch, listen to, or read them to express their own disorientations, and allow others' experiences to come to seem more bearable. Charles identifies one way in

which emotional indeterminacy can relate to ethics: “Emotionally relating to one another is super important, but it is very uncomfortable. I feel very uncomfortable and unnerved by this all. But I’m glad that I’m just naming it for what it is.” Charles realizes that deeply felt indeterminate emotions might be easiest to just push down, push away—the tone of the vlog is itself reluctant and at times unconvinced of whether even talking about the felt indeterminacy will help—while recognizing the act of pushing them down as a “cop out”. Charles takes himself to be responsible for working with the emotions, and recognizes that this will take considerable effort. Notice a distinction between this and Jaggar’s suggestions regarding outlaw emotions: Charles’ experiences are indeterminate, they do not point to an understanding of justice/injustice, and they do not primarily highlight problems in the actions of others. Rather, they spur deeper social engagement, calling Charles to be more openly vulnerable, and others to be more dynamically supportive.⁵⁸ Engaging with emotional indeterminacy, according to Charles, fosters better engagement with the emotional complexities of others and allows opportunities to access and provide better relational support. At the same time, affective disorientations introduce new questions about responsible expression: expressing majorly disoriented emotions can be disorienting for others, we can sometimes partially control emotional expression, and sometimes we are called from a motive of care to protect others from major disorientation at particular times. When affective disorientations spur communication, they can strengthen capacities for interpersonal dependence and support, not only of those directly experiencing the disorientations, but also of loved ones around

⁵⁸ Alison Bechdel’s graphic novel *Fun Home* is a beautiful, heartwrenching illustration of how self-identifications (e.g., of queer orientations) can be made possible partly by processes of grief and mourning (Bechdel 2007).

them. The communities surrounding Charles, Pratt, and Didion can become better able to provide affective support when they are depended on for relational support. The extent to which disorientations can benefit agency depends in part on the ways disoriented people are responded to in communities—I take up this point in chapter seven. For now, the main claim is that although disorientations can also make things worse—as when gun sales soar in Arizona following the January 8, 2011 shooting of US Congress Representative Gabrielle Giffords and others—contra dominant views, they do not always. Even if there are some affects that are always better off avoided—perhaps, for instance, terror—affective disorientation does not belong in that category.

The benefits of affective disorientation for agency overlap with what I suggested were some benefits of corporeal disorientation for agency; this is to be expected given my claim about the simultaneity of embodied, affective, and epistemological experiences of disorientation, but it is interesting to note how benefits show up differently when different dimensions of experience are in focus. Bodily disorientations, I claimed, strengthen agency by making us more sensitive to bodily vulnerabilities, more focused in prioritizing, more compelled by political urgency, more interested in learning from challenging embodiments, and more able to recognize the relational rather than individualistic nature of our agency. They also importantly cued us to the questionability of social norms. In this chapter, I have suggested that affective disorientations make us more aware of affective complexity, more able to face indeterminate situations productively, and more likely to build and benefit from the parts of relationality that support our lives. The dual experience of disorientation was introduced in chapter two's

discussion of Heyes' description of yoga: the body-transformative experience of yoga is both unsettling and interesting, both shocking and surprising. Affective disorientations might likewise be felt as simultaneously or alternatingly excitement and anxiety, worry and focus, instability and flexibility. Affective disorientation is usually a moving target of feeling, not easily identified or described. It is hard to even *observe* the feeling of being disoriented because the dualness of disoriented affect can involve a great deal of shifting between feelings, which is further complicated by the ways in which observing feelings can involve further detachment from them, further changing our experiences of emotion. While disorientation as affect can be lasting, and current experiences of it can be similar to past ones or to those of others, making it potentially familiar over time, disorientation as affect is dynamic rather than stationary.

We can read DesAutels' account of 'moral mindfulness' as a useful characterization of one kind of moral affect – including the feelings which accompany and maintain attentiveness, sensitivity, and care. She explains the following:

We tend to underestimate how prone we are to mindless habits and social influences, [and] we tend to overestimate that we will, in fact, interpret and respond to situations in ways that best follow through on our moral commitment to care...We can only see and act on the suffering that others do not notice when we successfully resist psychological tendencies either to lock into single perspectives or to conform. There are, as I see it, two main avenues for resisting. One is simply to attempt to improve our own individual psychologies. The other is to attempt to

improve the social contexts within which our psychologies are embedded.

(DesAutels 2004, 79)

My claim, to be argued for further in chapter five, is that affective disorientations can help us do both.

5. Conclusions

The affect of disorientation is not experienced only in negative or difficult ways—disorientation can also be experienced as partly or chiefly exciting. Excitement as affect can be read in the disorientations of Ahmed’s queer feelings (Ahmed 2004, 165; 2006b, 154), Lugones’ playful world travelling (chapter 2.1), Heyes’ transformative body practices (chapter 2.3), Charles’ curiosity about feelings, and even in the ‘magic’ of Didion’s title. We might think back also to Servan-Schreiber’s description of the “surprising momentum” he felt the night before his major surgery, upon helping a fellow patient into her car: a momentum that contrasted with his experiences of being slowed with identification as a ‘patient’, and one which he connects to a feeling of profound peace. Increased sensitivity to beauty, sensuousness, and generosity also comes out in Charles, Didion, and Pratt. Given how important non-combative responses to disorientations might be for making them productive, the playfulness of these experiences might be one of the most important aspects of feeling disoriented. The difference between feeling ‘up in the air’ and feeling ‘out of control’ might be part of the difference between an affective disorientation that mobilizes and one which paralyzes.

In this chapter, I have drawn on philosophy of emotions in order to characterize affective dimensions of disorientation and their effects in light of agency. It is partly the complexity of affective experiences of disorientation – in particular, their felt indeterminacy, tension, and swell – that allows disorientations to motivate new ways of acting. I have so far focused on exploring how disorientations can change the agency of individuals and communities by changing the ways we identify and act, largely apart from changing the way they think, reflect and know – the next chapter on epistemological disorientation allows for considering that part of the picture.

Chapter Four: Epistemological Disorientation

The Meditation of yesterday has filled my mind with so many doubts that it is no longer in my power to forget them. And yet I do not see how I shall be able to resolve them; and, as though I had suddenly fallen into very deep water, I am so taken unawares that I can neither put my feet firmly down on the bottom nor swim to keep myself on the surface. I make an effort, nevertheless, and follow afresh the same path upon which I entered yesterday, in keeping away from everything of which I can conceive the slightest doubt, just as if I knew that it was absolutely false; and I shall continue always in this path until I have encountered something which is certain, or at least, if I can do nothing else, until I have learned with certainty that there is nothing certain in the world.

(René Descartes 1971, 102)

There is no orientation to bringing something into being if there is no awareness of something lacking in a situation. The lacks, as we have seen, may be due to what has happened in the past, to injustices in the present, to the deficits and discomforts associated with being alive at a particular time and place. They may be due to unreflectiveness, to the incapacity to interpret lived situations. It seems evident that all this holds relevance for a conception of education—if education is conceived as a process of futuring, of releasing persons to become different, of provoking persons to repair lacks and to take action to create themselves.

(Maxine Greene 1988, 22)

Disorientations often disrupt our cognitive processes; they can have serious implications for what, how, and how well we know, and for the relevance we ascribe to various kinds of knowledge in our lives. We have seen already how trauma disoriented Brison's sense

of knowledge about her projects, how oppression disoriented Du Bois' knowledge about his position in society, how identity transition disoriented Charles' ways of knowing about emotional experience, and how acknowledging ethical implication disorients Pratt's knowledge of her community and political role. Felt disorientations often disrupt our practices of knowing, and the disruption of knowledge can prompt experiences of disorientation.

It might be claimed that nearly all practices of knowledge acquisition involve disorientation: every time we gain new knowledge, our ways of thinking, acting, and relating within the world are potentially altered; in this sense, all processes of belief-acquisition, learning, remembering, forgetting, and imagining could be disorienting. Particularly interesting for feminists and other political theorists might be connections between disorientation and memory (Blustein 2008; Campbell 2003; Casey 1987), between disorientation and social imaginaries (Code 1998; Gatens 1996; James 2002; Le Doeuff 2002; Lloyd 2000), and between disorientation and epistemologies of ignorance (Sullivan and Tuana 2007).⁵⁹ I do not consider so wide a sense of disruption here. Rather, three senses of epistemological disorientation run through examples in this chapter: 1) disorientations triggered by having knowledge shaken or called into question; 2) disorientations triggered by not having knowledge of something it seems we would or should have knowledge about; and 3) disorientations triggered by gaining new knowledge. My aim here is to provide a nuanced account of why and how these

⁵⁹ As Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana describe it, "Epistemology of ignorance is an examination of the complex phenomena of ignorance, which has as its aim identifying different forms of ignorance, examining how they are produced and sustained, and what role they play in knowledge practices" (Sullivan and Tuana 2007, 1).

experiences can be disorienting, and how the epistemological disorientations involved in, for example, doubt and education, can be productive rather than problematic parts of knowing. The main task of this chapter is to characterize what can be distinctly epistemological about disorientations, give concrete cases to ground and detail my characterization, and suggest ways in which epistemological disorientations can benefit agency.

I begin in section one by characterizing epistemological dimensions of disorientation; we most often experience epistemological disorientations when our practices of knowing are disrupted in one or more of the three above ways, while we are still required to communicate and act as knowers in our communities. I then turn to fleshing out experiences of epistemological disorientation by considering how they can be triggered by self-doubt (section two) and education (section three). In section four, I clarify how part of the disruption of epistemological disorientations results from disruption of agents' processes of expectation and decision making. I conclude by arguing for the importance of epistemological disorientations for the generation of epistemic humility, interdependence in knowledge practices, and the ongoing revision of what we think we know. As in the discussions of embodiment and affect, my project here is to introduce a framework for conceptualizing the epistemological dimensions of disorientation alongside bodily and affective experience, and to flesh out the details of what can trigger epistemological disorientations by drawing on specific characterizations of disrupted experience. While in previous chapters I drew mainly on autobiographical accounts of experienced disorientations, here I find resources in the history of philosophy

(especially Descartes and Kant) and in the examples used by contemporary philosophers of doubt, education, expectation, and deliberation.

1. Characterizing Epistemological Disorientations

Epistemological disorientations are *experiences of disruption in processes of knowledge formation, application, and revision which challenge our position as knowers, reconfigure what knowledge we take to be reliable, and cause us to re-evaluate the strength of our commitment to knowledge claims*. We experience epistemological disorientations when our processes of knowing are disrupted, such that some of the ways we have become accustomed to knowing and relying on knowledge are no longer easy, comfortable, or dependable. It might be suggested that we face epistemological disorientation in nearly every context of knowing: while it is true that disorientation is on a continuum, and disruption in cases of knowing are experienced more commonly than philosophers have thought, I am identifying a particular set of cases as epistemological disorientations: cases where we are in some sense lost in practices of knowing and without knowledge of how to proceed. If the epistemological aspect of disorientations is discrete from their embodied and affective aspects, it is, as Dewey reminds us, only in analysis, never in experience. As in my analyses of corporeal and affective disorientations so far, pulling out one part of the experience is inevitably somewhat distorting. Such disorientations can be felt at any point in particular processes of knowledge acquisition or application, or for periods of time in knowers' lives. Although it can be very disorienting to discover that I was wrong about something I thought I

knew, the epistemological disorientations with the promise for agency that interest me most are those that prompt shifts in *how* we know, how we view ourselves as knowers, and how we understand our knowledge to connect to that of others. Very often, it is not error alone that disorients, so much as the way we find out and the potential we feel we have to correct the error (e.g., discovering that I have deep-seated racist responses to an event, and struggling to know what I might do about them). On my view, epistemological disorientations disrupt six connected parts of our processes of knowing and our positions as knowers: they cut at *what* we know, *how* we know, *how we feel* about knowing, *who we are* as knowers, and *whether or how we can act* on the basis of knowledge. Overall, epistemological disorientations disrupt cognitive aspects of our lives in ways which make it difficult to continue to act as we have in the past, or as we expect we will be able to. I return to these dimensions of disruption in examples throughout the chapter.

Epistemological disorientations often feel like confusion, frustration, fatigue, and short-sightedness. As in Brison's case of disorientation triggered by trauma, we may feel a push to think through to the end of a given situation and find that path blocked—we cannot anticipate as well as we might typically, we lack the clear judgment that we have had in the past, we miss capacities to think critically or to recall past knowledge. Epistemological disorientations can feel like clouded capacities to plan, understand, test, and remember, or like scrambling to re-institute interpretations. Alongside the affective dimensions of Didion's disorientation triggered by grief, we saw such disorientations are often evidenced by difficulty in maintaining lines of thought, struggles to communicate

or describe what I know, and inclinations to repeatedly remind ourselves or others of the basics of what we *do* know. In all cases of felt epistemological disorientation, what or how we know becomes unsettled and we find it difficult to continue in some aspect of our cognitive lives.

It is also worth noting that we can be disoriented without knowing it, though not without feeling it. Although someone must feel at least some of the feelings I have described as felt disorientation if their experiences are to be understood as disorientations, they need not classify those experiences as ‘disorientations’; that is, particular feelings are necessary conditions for an experience to count as disorientation, but corresponding categorizations by the individual are not. We often only come to view experiences as disorientations in retrospect; many of us tend to view ourselves as ‘oriented’ (in the sense of having a clear sense of our embodied, affective, and epistemological experiences, identities, and projects), even in the midst of crises that we recognize after some time, potentially only after they have ended, as having been severely disorienting.⁶⁰ In the midst of even severe disorientations, we can tend to march on.

My analysis of the experiences of epistemological disorientation is meant to connect to various accounts of what happens in our processes of knowing; as long as an epistemological position accounts for subjects of knowledge and processes by which they gain knowledge, my

⁶⁰ Tendencies to fail to recognize what we are feeling as a period of disorientation could be interesting to analyze through a lens of alienation or false consciousness—it seems that the failure to recognize disorientations would in every case be conditioned by social assumptions that connect disorientation to major difficulty or the liabilities of mental illness.

account of how we experience epistemological disorientations will add relevant nuance to it. My account of epistemological disorientation should be seen as compatible with accounts of both propositional and non-propositional knowledge, and especially where such accounts inform discussions of how knowing connects to acting, as in cases where knowing about my complicity in moral wrong should play a part in motivating me to act differently.

On a general propositional model of knowledge where '*S knows that P iff S has a justified, true belief that P*', my account of epistemological disorientation can inform understandings of the 'S' (subject) of knowledge, the conditions which enable 'S' to acquire or maintain justified, true beliefs, the processes of knowledge acquisition and maintenance, and the processes by which S's knowledge shapes how she acts and communicates. Specifically, I am interested in how some of S's experiences can disrupt her processes of coming to acquire, maintain, or act on the basis of her belief that P. Some justified, true beliefs that P, or some realizations of their falseness, can be so disruptive to S that other processes of knowing, acting, and communicating can be disrupted.

In general, accounts of non-propositional dimensions of knowledge (also sometimes referred to as 'implicit understanding') focus on the processes of gaining knowledge that centrally involve embodied and affective, and thus not purely cognitive, experience. Non-propositional models of knowledge take bodily and emotional experience to be epistemologically relevant, and often aim to highlight the epistemic content of bodily and affective experience. Purely propositional models of knowledge do not do justice to kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing which Babbitt describes as "knowledge people possess in the

form of intuitions, attitudes, ways of behaving, orientation, and so on...Personal transformation often *is* the acquiring of nonpropositional understanding, the bringing about of practices and conditions that constitute an interpretive position and hence epistemic standards” (1996, 50, 53-54). Varying accounts of non-propositional knowledge can be found in Calhoun 1984, Babbitt 1996, Gordon 1997, Zita 1998, Bartky 2002, Meyers 2004, Shotwell 2009.⁶¹ Non-propositional knowledge connects to the processes discussed in chapter two’s consideration of body memory (through Casey, Maclaren, and Merleau-Ponty) and chapter three’s discussion of coming to recognize indeterminate and ‘free-form’ emotions (through Campbell). The effects of epistemological disorientations are perhaps even clearer on accounts of knowledge which are less effable, more grounded in bodily experience—insofar as felt disorientations confuse and disrupt habitual bodily and affective experiences, they have the potential to disrupt the knowledge we gain from everyday experience. Put differently, if we gain knowledge of, for example, areas that are safe for us to be ourselves in (as opposed to those which are dangerous given our gender, race, etc.)—a kind of knowledge very often put in terms of ‘gut feeling’—from being in tune with how we are feeling in body and emotions, we are less likely to have such knowledge the less comfortable we are feeling in our bodies. Understanding some sensuous experiences as ways of knowing is helpful for properly understanding how felt disorientations on partly embodied and affective levels can also be distinctly epistemological.

⁶¹ I take the following claim from Jacquelyn Zita as an important starting point for thinking about non-propositional knowledge: “Theory-making need not exclude moments of in-articulation, of intuition and subconscious access moving toward words. These ways of knowing feel immediate: we commonly say I knew it ‘at once,’ ‘in my bones,’ ‘in my gut,’ ‘in my heart,’ or ‘at first sight.’ We place these ways of knowing in an infallible metaphorical body, one we can trust. The body’s theory-making includes these intuitions as anchors for more elaborate theoretical constructions *of the body* in its many disciplines.” (Zita 1998, 206).

When I discuss knowledge in the context of epistemological disorientation, I am more interested in modes of knowing than models of knowledge. What is at issue in epistemological disorientations is a non-technical sense of knowledge: what we believe we know or believe to be true. When we assume or believe something to be knowledge, we may believe it with an intensity that does not accompany all our beliefs, and having such beliefs shaken could be severely disorienting. What interests me are experiences of being shaken when what we believe we know is called into question, as can happen in processes of doubt and education.

In chapters two and three, I argued that the benefits of corporeal and affective disorientations for agency are not in every case dependent on processes of personal reflection; I have considered throughout senses in which felt disorientations can benefit our capacities for acting responsibly even without or before cueing us to think differently about our actions or responsibilities. Establishing the promise of felt disorientations apart from processes of reflection is important not only to do justice to actual experience, but also to guard against two of the most valued and troubling commitments of much of the western philosophical heritage (at least narrowly conceived): to a dualistic vision of personhood, and to the value of reflection over other human capacities. To position reflection as the central mediator between felt disorientations and improved moral agency would be to miss one of the insights gained from investigating the complexities of experienced disorientation: our experiences can improve us as agents apart from our understanding or consent. Having said this, felt disorientations can compel reflection and changes in how we reflect in ways which are ethically productive, eventually helping us

to, for example, *see* ourselves as implicated in unjust circumstances, *understand* systematic/structural harms, and *intend* to act in new ways. Epistemological disorientations are often the most adequate responses to situations: efforts to gain knowledge from sensuous experience that resists classification, to develop expectations in the face of inconsistent and unpredictable experiences, and to reflect on our desires and preferences when they are opaque to us are common and worthwhile pursuits, all likely to involve experiences of disorientation. Very often such disorientations result from the tension between our efforts to think clearly and act decisively and the actual indeterminacy of how we ought to think or act in complex social circumstances. The examples of self-doubt and education characterize how changed capacities for reflection can be part of how epistemological disorientations help.

2. Self-Doubt

We can doubt our own identities and cultural involvements when we call into question our sexual orientations, cultural identifications, racial and ethnic group memberships, genders, political involvements, and social affiliations. We might doubt or question our identities upon realizing discomforts within specific groups, being newly understood or described by others, or coming to question the moral appropriateness of our involvements. As in all epistemological disorientations, periods of self-doubt are likely to involve clusters of questions and confusions about what and how I know, how I feel about my knowledge, and questions around my identity as a knower and my capacities to act on the basis of knowledge. What do I know most firmly about my identity? Can I

trust myself? Have I been deceiving myself? Am I a hypocrite? What do I know about my relationships with others? What kind of ethical action am I capable of and/or called to? Am I understanding my situation well and acting as best I can? What might I regret later? These are reflective questions, but important parts of everyday lives. Periods of severe self-doubt can involve various levels of epistemological disorientation, often triggered by the need to reshape our identities or commitments given limited or newly available resources, as when major aspects of our lives change in becoming parents, teachers, or political leaders in our communities.⁶² Periods of self-doubt rarely involve only lack of knowledge about ourselves, but also problems in the corresponding opinion we have of ourselves and our worth. We might think of the self-doubt involved in radically questioning my personal or occupational capacities/expertise (e.g., as a new parent, as an Ob-Gyn who delivers a baby who dies), my intentions (e.g., to stay with a career path as a cleric who loses faith), my understanding of the past (e.g., whether my romantic partner and I agreed about what our commitments were; whether I properly understood the war in which I was fighting as a soldier) or my vision of the future (e.g., as a citizen who has voted for a politician). Often, experiences of self-doubt can be triggered by learning that I was mistaken about the world in some important way (e.g., if I thought that the police could always be trusted and then knew someone injured as a peaceful protester at the 2010 G20). When I learn the world was importantly different from my past vision of it, I might struggle to trust the rest of my visions of it. The extent to which doubting particular parts of my experience will involve or compel *self*-doubt depends on how deeply I identify with them, or on how important they are for my

⁶² In *Visible Identities*, Linda Martín Alcoff discusses both the promise of doubt and the development of moral agency and identity, but she does not analyze the issues together.

identity. The depth of my experience of self-doubt also depends on the ways parts of my life can be called into question at the same time—minor doubts that intersect (e.g., about my desires and my capacities at the same time) can make for more major experiences of self-doubt.

Philosophers are often interested in experiences of doubt. Without intending to provide such accounts, their descriptions of doubt can provide excellent insight into what epistemological disorientations feel like, and into what kind of actions they trigger. René Descartes' *Meditations* is likely the best known and most sustained description of doubt in the tradition, and it is worth noting how even when Descartes frames doubt as only temporary and instrumentally valuable for coming to more certain understanding,⁶³ and even when the doubt is not described as self-doubt so much as doubt about the world around him, his descriptions are often rich and able to capture what the shake of uncertainty about ourselves as knowers can feel like. Many of Descartes' and Peirce's descriptions of severe doubt involve imagery of deep water, and being over one's head, preventing an individual from getting his bearings—if we read intense doubt as disorientation, we can draw connections between these epistemological experiences and the corporeal and affective experiences I have discussed (e.g., particularly affective swell). I draw on Descartes' characterization of the disorientations of doubt in general in order to clarify what can be so disruptive about periods of doubting ourselves.

⁶³ As he puts it: "My plan has never gone beyond trying to reform my own thoughts and to build a foundation which is wholly my own" (Descartes 1971, 38).

Whether Descartes would describe his doubt as such, his characterization provides a detailed description of the intensity of epistemological disorientations. Even as he restricts his project to being about cognitive doubt, the process of doubting nonetheless bleeds into a more substantial disorientation. His own description of the project gives a nuanced description of what deep doubt can feel like:

I shall suppose, therefore, that there is, not a true God, who is the sovereign source of truth, but some evil demon, no less cunning and deceiving than powerful, who has used all his artifice to deceive me. I will suppose that the heavens, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds, and all external things that we see, are only illusions and deceptions which he uses to take me in. I will consider myself as having no hands, eyes, flesh, blood, or senses, but as believing wrongly that I have all these things. I shall cling obstinately to this notion; and if, by this means, it is not in my power to arrive at the knowledge of any truth, at the very least it is in my power to suspend my judgement. This is why I shall take great care not to accept into my belief anything false, and shall so well prepare my mind against all the tricks of this great deceiver that, however powerful and cunning he may be, he will never be able to impose on me. But this undertaking is arduous, and a certain indolence leads me back imperceptibly into the ordinary course of life. And just as a slave who was enjoying in his sleep an imaginary freedom, fears to be awakened when he begins to suspect that his liberty is only a dream, and conspires with these pleasant illusions to be deceived by them longer, so I fall back of my own accord into my former opinions, and fear to awake from this slumber lest the laborious wakeful hours which would follow this peaceful rest, instead of bringing me any light of day

into the knowledge of truth, would not be sufficient to disperse the shadows caused by the difficulties which have just been raised. (Descartes 1971, 100-101)

Descartes' project is artificial given the way he chose how and when to embark on it, selecting and securing conditions for it as a project with a specific end. Even so, Descartes voices a number of the feelings that can accompany severe self-doubt: for example, a sense that if such doubt has any value, it must be only instrumental; and uncertainty about how much or little is called into question by experiences of doubt. Descartes communicates feelings of stubbornness, self-protection, fatigue, and fear. He identifies tendencies to slide back into habitual ways of thinking he knows despite having admitted major uncertainty—tendencies towards felt orientation rather than disorientation. As the meditations continue, Descartes expresses how repeatedly shocking and astonishing it can be to realize how little he knows (1971, 104), describes the ruminative experience as 'turning things over in his mind' (1971, 105), the conflict of realizing something as unknowable and yet identifying remnants of drives still to know (1971, 108), and the wandering of the mind and the re-tightening of its reins (1971, 108). He characterizes knowledge as having been 'imprinted' on his mind (1971, 112), and then to some extent un-imprinted, the realm of possibilities re-inflated by the experience of doubt. In the third meditation, Descartes speaks at length of the introspective quality of his doubt, his efforts to stop his senses and prevent interruption in order to clear up what he is allowed to think. He describes also feelings of humility given the fallibility of his knowledge (feeling small and limited; 1971, 133); in general, heightened sensitivity to the origins of his beliefs (1971, 152-153); often a felt distance between his experience

and his categorization of the experience (1971, 154); and the need to continue to act, even in the face of doubt (1971, 169). The passage cited in the epigraph to this chapter is one of the most explicit descriptions of Descartes' felt experience: Descartes feels like he is in deep water and able to neither hold himself still nor swim (1971, 102). Although the rich descriptions of epistemological disorientations become rarer as the *Meditations* go on, in keeping with Descartes' claims to gradually greater certainty, throughout the *Meditations*, Descartes does a lot of stock-taking: what can he know, what is he justified in trying to know, what benefit will his various efforts be to his project. Genevieve Lloyd captures well the tone of Descartes' epistemological disorientation:

Descartes' *Meditations* is suffused with a sense of the tenuousness of the self's capacity either to integrate itself into the world or to maintain a secure relationship with its past. The Cartesian thinking self experiences its very existence as fragile...For Descartes the easy inhabiting of [the] everyday world rests on the capacity to separate out the clear and distinct from the intrusions of the body, even if that cognitive possibility is rarely realized. The sensuous confusion of the realm of the intermingling of mind and body becomes intellectually manageable through the assurance that there are reliable criteria for distinguishing it from the realm of clear and distinct ideas. (Lloyd 1993, 46, 54-55)

We may share these experiences when facing periods of intense doubt, as one set of epistemological disorientations—particularly attempts to pause and get clear on or cling to what we *do* know—are likely to be part of feeling deeply disoriented.

Descartes highlights how affective dimensions of disorientation accompany epistemological dimensions by introducing one of the major sets of feelings that can be involved in doubt: *powerlessness*. We can note how often Descartes positions himself as having or lacking power, and specifically the power to control his access to or acceptance of knowledge. The image of slavery in the above passage is telling; a significant part of the difficulty of epistemological disorientations in general (and severe doubt in particular) can be the feeling that we had in the past possessed knowledge securely, which gave us both something to use (accessing, communicating, and relying on knowledge) and something to be (a knower). The loss of certainty about what we knew or can know can be like losing possession, occupation, and identity—becoming slave to the more powerful deceiver who can make everything doubtful. Descartes retains only the power to suspend his judgment, left with only the certain knowledge that “there is nothing certain in the world.”

Although Descartes is discussing a severe set of doubts which in some sense call most of the conditions of his life into question, the doubts result in a major piece of knowledge about himself: whether the external world exists or not, *he does*. So Descartes’ epistemological disorientation results from calling into question foundational aspects of the world. Descartes’ metaphysical doubt is distinct from the kinds of *self-doubt* that interest me most, and which may be more likely to be experienced as blocks in capacities for individual agency. Self-doubt can mean various things, according to what aspect of ourselves we are doubting: I am interested less in the metaphysical doubts I may have about, for example, whether I am the same person over time (e.g., as Sydney

Shoemaker 1963 takes up the question in *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity*), and more in the practical doubts I might have about my capacities, personality, interests, roles, and responsibilities. Ultimately, Descartes is interested in doubt only within the limits of particular foundational beliefs—he can maintain confidence in his identity as a thinking thing—and I am interested in the doubt that triggers shifts in what we take to be foundational in self-understanding and worldview. More specific experiences of self-doubt can help illustrate the ways epistemological disorientations can disrupt my capacities to recognize myself, identify, and act.

A) The Case Of Charlotte

In his article, “Feeling Crazy: Self-Worth and the Social Character of Responsibility,” Paul Benson offers the example of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a white, middle-class American author in the 1880s, who radically alters her life situation in response to deep self-doubt. Charlotte is expected to take up the social norms of her social situation—as wife, mother of a young child, and housekeeper, her community expects her to embody contentment and competence in all affairs of home-based relationships. But she is deeply unhappy in these roles: “She detests conventional feminine roles so thoroughly that she wants very much to leave her husband and young child to pursue an artistic career, writing, painting, and lecturing” (Benson 2000,74-75). On Benson’s account, Charlotte experiences ‘craziness’ in such a way that she “doubts her own moral capacities and this doubt jeopardizes that portion of [Charlotte’s] moral self-respect that consists in her sense of her worthiness to answer for her actions” (Benson 2000, 75). After an attempt at

following her doctor's orders for the 'rest cure', as Benson reads the case, Charlotte leaves her husband and attempts a career as a writer and artist. "All the while she continues to feel that she must be quite emotionally deranged to be doing such a thing. In fact, she regards her leaving as good evidence of her mental infirmity" (Benson 2000, 74).

Gilman's case is helpful to read for a phenomenology of self-doubt; although she also characterizes severe depression more generally. In *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* she offers rich autobiographical descriptions of the intensities and attributes of self-doubt over time. Gilman's descriptions of self-doubt occur against the background of vibrant health and embodiment as a teenager and young adult:

My health was splendid, I never tired, with a steady cheerfulness which external discomforts or mishaps could not dim. When asked, 'How do you do?' it was my custom to reply, 'as well as a fish, as busy as a bee, as strong as a horse, as proud as a peacock, as happy as a clam'... Among the many splendid movements of the late nineteenth century was one dear to my heart, that toward a higher physical culture...In this line of improvement I was highly ambitious...Going twice a week, each day I ran a mile, not for speed but wind, and can still run better than many a younger woman. I could vault and jump, go up a knotted rope, walk on my hands under a ladder, kick as high as my head, and revel in the flying rings. (1972, 71, 64, 67)

Gilman highlights in particular her clarity of mind and ratiocination (1972, 72-74), her ability to cleanly evaluate her way through confusions, worries, or uncertainties, as well

as to easily decide which paths of action were best, and to follow them straightforwardly, even in the face of challenge. She explains, “I was used to bearing things, so tremendously upheld inside by the sense of power, of purpose, of big work before me, and by the triple-plated defense of my strong philosophy, that I used honestly to say I could not imagine the combination of circumstances that would *make* me unhappy” (1972, 77). Gilman begins to note changes in these aspects of herself, first triggered by a year of grief when a dear friend marries and moves away, and becoming amplified when she meets Charles Walter Stetson:

Very promptly he asked me to marry him. Very promptly I declined. Then, reviewing the occurrence with that cold philosophy of mine, I asked myself, ‘Is it right so lightly to refuse what after all may be the right thing to do?’ This is a vivid commentary on my strenuous youth. Between deprivation and denial from outside, and intense self-denial from within, there was no natural response of inclination or desire, no question of ‘Do I love him?’ only, ‘Is it right?’ (1972, 82)

Gilman’s self-doubt becomes most difficult to endure when it complicates her sense of the intuitive or obvious distinction between right and wrong action. Her characteristic decisiveness fades more as she faces the confusion about whether or who to marry. Her courtship introduces a new sense of insecurity; Gilman provides a vivid description of experiences of doubt:

...Followed a time of what earlier novelists used to call ‘conflicting emotions.’ There was the pleasure of association with a noble soul, with one who read and studied and cared for real things, of sharing high thought and purpose, of sympathy in many common deprivations and endurances. There was the natural

force of sex-attraction between two lonely young people, the influence of propinquity. Then, on my part, periods of bitter revulsion, of desperate efforts to regain the dispassionate poise, the balanced judgment I was used to. My mind was not fully clear as to whether I should or should not marry. On the one hand I knew it was normal and right in general, and held that a woman should be able to have marriage and motherhood, and do her work in the world also. On the other, I felt strongly that for me it was not right, that the nature of the life before me forbade it, that I ought to forego the more intimate personal happiness for complete devotion to my work. Having lived so long on clear convictions, on definite well-reasoned decisions, there was something ignominious in feeling myself slip and waver in uncertainty.⁶⁴ (Gilman 1972, 83)

Eventually, Gilman does marry Stetson, and gives birth to her daughter Katharine—but the self-doubt continues. As in many stories from new parents, the baby introduces more complex experiences than Gilman had anticipated, and others around her seem to continue as though everything were normal. She struggles to understand why her decision has not overridden her indecisiveness:

We were really very happy together. There was nothing to prevent it but that increasing depression of mine...Here was a charming home; a loving and devoted husband; an exquisite baby; healthy, intelligent and good; a highly competent mother to run things; a wholly satisfactory servant—and I lay all day on the lounge and cried. (1972, 87)

⁶⁴ The affective as well as epistemological dimensions of Gilman's disorientation are evident in the deliberation about whether to marry: the *felt tension* between resolve to do what was straightforwardly and socially acceptable and the fear that doing so would make her terribly unhappy.

Gilman's misery continues and results in a major disruption of her life. Gilman describes the depression's effects on thought and motivation as being like a 'dark fog that rose in her mind' (95), making for 'drowned time' (115), and 'a constant dragging weariness miles below zero' (91). In her chapter 'The Breakdown', Gilman describes the incessant self-criticism and questioning: "Feeling the sensation fear, the mind suggests every possible calamity; the sensation shame—remorse—and one remembers every mistake and misdeeds of a lifetime, and grovels to the earth in abasement...Prominent among the tumbling suggestions of a suffering brain was the thought, 'You did it yourself! You did it yourself!'" (Gilman 1972, 91). From Gilman's descriptions, we come to see how self-doubt can be characterized by shifts in clarity of thought, in ease of embodiment, in presumed immunity to struggle, and in her capacities to position herself with respect to action. Gilman's case highlights well the corporeal dimensions of unease and discomfort at work alongside epistemological dimensions of the disorientations of her self-doubt. Her experiences of depression are shot through with questioning: how can this be happening? Gilman's account clarifies a major component of severe self-doubt: a failure to recognize myself in my life, and a corresponding difficulty in being recognized by others. Her self-doubt makes unclear both what the best actions are and how to position herself to act.

Yet, in contrast to Benson's account of self-doubt as primarily debilitating, Gilman's account emphasizes the path from major doubt to new possibilities for action. At a certain point in the fog of depression, Gilman describes a clearing, a more certain move: Gilman and Stetson decide to end their relationship after over four years, and

Gilman decides to take their young daughter and move with a dear friend Grace to Pasadena.

Finally in the fall of '87 in a moment of clear vision, we agreed to separate, to get a divorce... That summer of 1887 was so dreadful, as I have said, that it drove me to the final decision that our marriage must end. Once the decision was made I breathed a little easier, there was a remote glimmer of hope. But we must wait till arrangements could be made, proper provision for the child, and so on...I set forth on October 8th [1887] with Katharine, Grace, [an] inadequate dressmaker, a large lunch-basket, my tickets, and all my remaining money in my pocket—ten dollars. 'What will you do when you get there?' asked anxious friends. 'I shall earn my own living.' 'How do you know you can?' 'I shall have to when I get there.'

(1972, 96-97, 104-106)

Gilman is clear that depression and periods of self-doubt persist through her life, but also makes clear how these periods gradually draw her to the kind of work and life she wants: in writing and art, in motherhood, in friendship, and in open, determined embodiment. She also clarifies how severe self-doubts humble her, forcing her off her 'high horse' of stark decisiveness, and bringing out her perpetual vulnerability, particularly insofar as how well she will feel is unpredictable over time. Gilman doesn't position herself as someone who knew herself best all along, and only forgot occasionally; instead, she sees herself as someone whose sense of self is in flux. Her life, as she means it to be, begins to take shape after leaving:

With Pasadena begins my professional 'living.' Before that there was no assurance of serious work. To California, in its natural features, I owe much. Its calm

sublimity of contour, richness of color, profusion of flowers, fruit and foliage, and the steady peace of its climate were meat and drink to me...In that first year of freedom I wrote some thirty-three short articles, and twenty-three poems, besides ten more child-verses. (1972, 107, 111)

She begins to position herself as an “invalid woman with a small child” (108), and as a “real author at last” (113). Her identity takes shape partly through rather than in spite of her depression and self-doubt, in process:

The effects of nerve bankruptcy remain to this day. So much of my many failures, of misplay and misunderstanding and ‘queerness’ is due to this lasting weakness, and kind friends to unfailingly refuse to allow for it, to believe it, that I am now going to some length in stating the case...To step so suddenly from proud strength to contemptible feebleness, from cheerful stoicism to a whimpering avoidance of any strain or irritation for fear of the collapse ensuing, is not pleasant, at twenty-four. To spend forty years and more in the patient effort of learning how to carry such infirmity so as to accomplish something in spite of it is a wearing process, full of mortification and deprivation. (1972, 97, 100)

It takes nothing away from acknowledging the effort involved in coping to point out that Gilman’s accomplishments might have been more through than in spite of her struggle.

Gilman’s case illustrates self-doubt as epistemological disorientation. In one sense, Gilman seems to be ‘of two (or more) minds’ about her illness: she believes the diagnosis and intends to follow the prescribed treatment, while at the same time struggling intensely with it and imagining a different possible course of action. She cares

about her family and identifies with her role as wife and mother, yet feels that she cannot take up that role in the way necessary to support rather than trouble her husband and child. Her case is complex and true to life in that she does not doubt some aspects of her identity without other possible identifications and actions becoming possible—it seems rare that we doubt all aspects of our identity at the same time. Epistemological disorientations can be complex, disrupting us at the intersection of what we think we know about ourselves, how we want to identify, and how we want to act, when our identifications and actions always involve and affect the other people in our lives. Unlike Descartes' socially isolated experience of doubt, Gilman's identity crisis had an impact on her security in the world and in relationships with others: it changed her actions, relationships, and what she thought was possible for herself, and it was to some extent thrust upon her given her social situation. Severe self-doubt can result in very real bodily risk (e.g., more struggle to obtain or maintain jobs, more struggle to compensate for vulnerable embodiments by building images and postures of strength and security); it can be interpreted as weakness and unreliability, especially on individuals already compromised by oppressive categorization. Not only can our understandings of our own identity be shaken, so can the affirmations we get from secure relationships with others over time. We can see how felt powerlessness might play into Gilman's experience as well, particularly in her attempt to reassert some agency, removing herself from the domestic situation she felt was likely to be bad for both her and her family.

For Benson's purposes, Charlotte's grave self-doubt calls into question her identity as a responsible, morally capable agent, as well as the extent to which she could

or should be held responsible for her actions. Benson argues that responsibility is diminished when self-worth is depressed, because of the ways in which depressed self-worth jeopardizes our abilities to account for our actions to others (2000, 81), to act and account for ourselves in ways regulated by publically shareable norms (82), and to participate in moral dialogue (83). By Benson's description, Charlotte is worse off when her identity, capacities and prospects are called into doubt. I do not take issue with Benson's use of this example, particularly given his overall focus on the importance of self-worth for responsible agency. I do, however, want to argue that, although Benson consistently understands self-doubt to be harmful, and in opposition to the developments of self-worth, self-trust, and responsibility, it would be useful to analyze more carefully the ways in which self-doubt actually functioned to help Gilman in her moral, political, and identificatory projects. Such an analysis would parallel the one I have suggested is necessary in response to Calhoun's claims in the last chapter about demoralization as bad for agency. Gilman's disorientation has complex implications: her doubt about her role and worth in her family situation happens interactively with her capacities for imagining a life which might better suit her. Part of my main point is that it was not only Gilman's recovery from disorientation that benefitted her agency, but that the ongoing experience of disorientation was integrated from the onset and through many years with new agentic possibilities.

In periods of self-doubt, Gilman could not recognize herself. Eventually, through these periods, she became able to recognize herself differently, partly by newly recognizing her embodiment (e.g., after bedrest had disrupted her love of exercise), her

work (e.g., when writings get published and she takes on challenging projects), her relationships (e.g., new ways of doing motherhood, friendship, and romance), and her geography (e.g., newly recognizing the effects of environment on her health). In processes of self-doubt, we can come to have the feeling of recognizing ourselves in our lives: we can find ourselves with the capacities to build the relationships, occupations, and homes that we want. Deep self-doubt can involve moments of self-recognition that give us momentum to act differently, even as self-doubt persists.

Given the responsibilities and commitments she has developed in her marriage and family life, I am not suggesting that we are likely to straightforwardly endorse Gilman's removing herself to pursue an artist's life. Instead, I suggest that we should pay more attention to how her radical self-doubt may have cued her and those around her to some ambiguities in her circumstance—in particular, to complexities in her position as a woman in her community and at that point in the history of sexism. Her situation is such that we might recognize disorientation as among a number of legitimate responses: it occurs to her on sensuous, affective, and cognitive levels, but is conditioned, triggered, and shaped by her social circumstance, by the diagnosis of 'craziness' and the prescription of isolation and bed-rest, and by the historical positioning as a desperate runaway rather than one who decided to move on.

B) Self-Doubt, Self-Trust, And Self-Respect

Gilman's experience of self-doubt might be thought of as disrupting even her basic senses of self-trust and self-respect; she doubts her moral worth and capacities for agency, that her presence benefits her family overall, and that her life has any meaning. Experiences of self-doubt can be so disorienting because of the power they have to disrupt many areas of experience: if I radically doubt myself, it can be hard to trust anyone else. Some theorists have suggested that while experiences of self-doubt may be useful at some minor levels, experiences of self-doubt which interfere with a person's basic sense of self-worth are in every case harmful.⁶⁵

Robin Dillon (1992, 1997) has argued for the importance of basal self-respect for agency.⁶⁶ According to her, basal self-respect is a basic orientation towards self and self's moral worth, which shapes the way individuals understand their identities and capacities for action. Dillon frames what I have distinguished as propositional and non-propositional knowledge as follows:

Distinguishing two modes of understanding, call them 'intellectual understanding' and 'experiential understanding,' allows us to say that individuals can both understand and not really understand their worth. Intellectual understanding involves having beliefs which one has reason to accept as true, then coming by inference to have other beliefs which one takes to be true in virtue of their logical relation to warranted beliefs, where the believing, inferring, and assessing need not

⁶⁵Self-doubt is often contrasted with self-trust or epistemic self-respect (see accounts of self-trust and respect in Jones 2004, Dillon 2004, and Christensen 2007, and Hill 1973).

⁶⁶ Laurence Thomas has also written extensively about self-respect, self-trust, and self-love. See Thomas 1989, especially chapters 6-8.

engage emotions. Experiential understanding involves experiencing something directly and feeling the truth of what is experienced. (Dillon 1997, 239)

Dillon offers a view of self-respect as:

a prereflective, unarticulated, emotionally laden presuppositional interpretive framework, an implicit 'seeing oneself as' or 'taking oneself to be' that structures our explicit experiences of self and worth. Let me call the way of being toward and with oneself that is constituted by this implicit interpretive framework basal self-respect... When secure and positive, basal self-respect involves an implicit confidence, an abiding faith in the rightness of my being, the unexpressed and unquestioned (indeed, unquestionable) assumption that it is good that I am. But when damaged or insecure, basal valuing is incessant whispering below the threshold of awareness: 'you're not good enough, you're nothing.' (Dillon 1997, 241-242)

It seems to me that Dillon's analysis of the importance of self-respect does not take into consideration the complexity of disoriented experience that I am drawing out here. For instance, in Dillon's example of Anne, a successful professional who nonetheless feels inadequate, her lack of self-respect is based more on a functional ambivalence than a disruptive uncertainty: "She cannot feel proud of herself or take pleasure in her accomplishments or feel satisfied with her life. Instead, she feels wholly inadequate and undeserving: each success feels like a fluke, those who praise her are only being nice" (Dillon 1997, 232). Anne believes herself to be adequate (propositionally, on good evidence), but has two conflicting kinds of knowledge: one propositional, and one non-

propositional about herself. I have been interested throughout in more severe cases of self-doubt, as in the case of Charlotte's 'slipping and wavering in uncertainty' which strike us more as ambiguous than ambivalent experience, and which disrupt our capacities to go on. As we have seen, in intense periods of disorientation like Gilman's, even the kind of clarity Anne has about her ambivalence can be lacking. As epistemologically disoriented, I may not sustain a rich underlying sense of self-trust at all, or I may only at some times or in some areas of self-knowledge. Self-doubt may in some cases run all the way down to leading an individual to question her self-worth while still being productive overall, if she is situated within a particular constellation of other experiences and social support. In any case, Dillon's relevance for my project stands: Dillon argues that whenever basal self respect is compromised, capacities for agency are compromised, and I am challenging that claim.

Dillon is surely right to think there are levels of self-doubt that run so deep that they lack the potential to be productive, or so deep that they uproot the very resources that could make them useful as disorientations.⁶⁷ Epistemological disorientations of severe self-doubt can be harmful at times and beneficial at others. Having said this, my position takes into account a familiar narrative that gets eclipsed by Dillon's analysis: it is sometimes understood that people can need to have experiences that shake them fundamentally in order to be able to face or deal with troubling forces in their lives (e.g., addictions, patterns of abuse, risky behaviour). Although this is not always the case that transformation requires challenge at the level of deep self-doubt, there is something right

⁶⁷ As she puts it, "When your life feels meaningless, your activities of little value, your abilities minimal, your character base; when feelings of worthlessness swamp everything else—when living feels like this, living well is impossible" (Dillon 1997, 226).

about the sense that transformation can require being disoriented to the point of seeing that I am no longer in control, as Gilman's case illustrates, and as is also evident in Minnie Bruce Pratt's case from the last chapter. Dillon's account does not seem to account for this. Such disorientation can often involve self-respect being compromised to some degree, and there is something about compromised self-respect that can allow for new ways of self-respecting—something about doubting that can allow for new ways of acting securely.

Like the corporeal and affective dimensions described in chapters two and three, it is not typically the case that epistemological dimensions of disorientation are either entirely productive or unproductive. As I conclude in chapter seven, on my account, the usefulness of disorientations is partly contingent on the social environment within which we are disoriented as well as on our own internal resources. Dillon notes that in some cases, efforts to reorient out of severe self-doubt may include overcompensative self-work: “where an individual's basal orientation toward her worth is uncertainty, she may struggle to cultivate evaluative self-respect by trying to be perfect, for then she might be good enough” (Dillon 1997, 242). It is not always the case that self-doubt harms us. But it remains to be considered further how, even when self-respect is disrupted, epistemological disorientations might lead us to question or reshape the communities or norms that are conditioning what counts as ‘good enough’ in the first place. That is, we still have not seen how epistemological disorientations can help us identify ourselves and change how we know for the better.

C) Disorientation And Indirect Identification

The formation of our identities is partly an epistemological practice. Identity doubt is beneficial to us when it allows us to rethink identifications which may have seemed compulsory, but which no longer fit our intuitions, projects, desires, or commitments. There can clearly be different levels of self-doubt, some which disrupt how in control we feel more than others. Self-doubt does not have to leave us feeling wholly out of control in order to function to benefit us; we can be partially in control of our processes of self-doubt and still experience unexpected fruitful effects. Felt lack of control might add levels of disorientation without necessarily making the disorientations more fruitful. The kinds of self-doubt which interest me most are those where at least some major area of my life becomes questionable. Even processes of self-doubt which we take on deliberately, to the extent that they still disrupt areas of our lives, can be beneficially disorienting.

One important way to distinguish between helpful and harmful experiences of self-doubt is by considering what kind of social relations are motivated by each: whereas helpful self-doubt can often inspire thriving social participation, harmful self-doubt more typically results in detrimental isolation or social connections that overwhelm my identity (e.g., individuals in cycles of abuse). Self-doubt can prompt more social involvements at some times and more distance or withdrawal from communities in others: as I discussed in chapter two, both kinds of developments can be fruitful ways of managing the fact (rather than any straightforward benefit) of our relational existence. I want to suggest

that we consider how the disorientations of self-doubt might help us as agents in part by fostering *indirect identificatory practices*. We might think of ‘direct’ identificatory practices as those in which we reflect, deliberate, prioritize, act, and identify in ways which push ahead in the direction of our overall commitments, life projects, and plans. For example, if I think I would be well-suited working in a given field, my direct identificatory practices might show my efforts towards that end: when I feel oriented in my efforts towards that end, the ways I think about my life, make decisions about where to live, take part-time jobs, and identify myself to potential employers are likely to be direct identificatory practices towards that end. Direct identificatory practices are facilitated by clarity about what kind of people we want to be and understanding of the components of the lives we want to lead. Indirect identificatory practices are murkier because they are often not shaped by clarity about the ends relevant to us or the steps necessary to reach them. We take up indirect practices of understanding, for instance, when we call aspects of our identities into question, when we doubt our interpersonal (cultural, social, sexual, racial, or gender) identities and affiliations, and when we critically evaluate our social and political involvements, often without yet knowing what we could or should do differently. ‘Indirect’ here means to capture the complicated ways in which even experiences and practices that don’t seem to be propelling or directing us into new actions or identifications can nonetheless be motivating and necessary for the directions and manners in which we identify in the future. Indirect identificatory practices might start, as in Gilman’s case, with feelings, functions, and radical uncertainty about what to think of our lives or our goals; self-doubt might involve depression. Indirect identificatory practices can be useful in part when they make new kinds of action

and identification possible to us, show aspects of our identities to be open to change, and sometimes make us aware of parts of our identity that are *less* movable. Sometimes we become best able to notice these possibilities when in partial isolation from others.

Joint practices of identity doubt can make individual agency and identification possible when others are willing to participate with us in situations of identity instability. Typically, though not always, others doubt our identities helpfully when they do so *with* us, and they do so harmfully when they doubt our identities *for* us.⁶⁸ We might experience periods of self-doubt when new and positive possibilities are presented to us (e.g., by finding out that a boss thinks I would make a great manager or that a fitness trainer thinks I could easily do a chin-up). Our identities are often also not called into doubt: we and others can opt not to doubt our identities, given circumstances in which we may not need to do so,⁶⁹ and we can opt not to doubt our identities even though we ought to do so. If we are members of dominant groups, we might never want to risk losing the benefits of privilege by calling our identities into question.⁷⁰

In addition to opting not to doubt our identities, we can also be prevented from engaging in identity doubt in and by oppressive contexts. We might see the benefits of self-doubt most clearly in cases of privileged individuals, for example as Pratt identifies

⁶⁸ I say that this is only typically and not exclusively the case because we should think it possible that others could doubt our identities for us, perhaps before we are ourselves willing or able to recognize our identifications as problematic, in ways which were not meant to harm us, and in ways which would eventually help us.

⁶⁹ This might be the case when we are participating in more direct identificatory practices, as Alcoff characterizes them.

⁷⁰ See Campbell 1999. Although dominant identities are often seen to be the least doubted, it is particularly critical that we view dominant identities as dubitable, given that dominant identities are often those most in need of interrogation.

the ways in which her serious disorientations were instrumental in her coming to challenge her own privilege in order to work better in support of anti-racist political efforts. It is likely harder to see the benefits of doubt for those already marginalized. Preventing others access to safe opportunities for self-doubt denies them possibilities for identity development, and dismisses their identities as rigid, unit-dimensional and fixed. For instance, colonized people are harmed when colonizers strategically deny them possibilities for doubting their identities (e.g. from doubting their identities as ‘the ignorant servant’, ‘the brutish slave’, or ‘the always-obedient religious believer’). Safe and open possibilities for identity doubt can be strategically denied to the oppressed. It might seem counterintuitive to say that we ought to work toward less oppressive social and cultural contexts by making room for members of oppressed groups to exercise co-constitutive identity doubt given that, whatever has been denied oppressed groups, doubt and dubitability they have been granted in excess—group members’ possibilities for identification have been repeatedly called into question. Historically, the visibility of certain identities has prompted considerable harmful identity doubt, particularly in racist and sexist contexts. The worth and identificatory capacities of visibly racialized and gender-differentiated identities have commonly have been strategically and harmfully made to seem doubtful. We see the connection between doubt and marginalization in Alcoff’s example of a teacher whose visible identity leads to his authority being called into doubt (Alcoff 2006, 192-193).

I would suggest that visibility can also prompt beneficial doubt when identities typically stereotyped or stigmatized on the basis of visibility call harmful cultural

processes into question. As Alcoff claims, “‘Feeling white,’ when coupled with a repudiation of white privilege, can disable a positive self-image as well as a felt connection to community and history, and generally can disorient identity formation” (2006, 206). Identity doubt can lead to positive identity co-constitution and re-identificatory practices, which can lead to stronger identities, and also stronger identity-based cultural groups. Mistaken assumptions about others’ identities as static often motivate or sustain harmfully denying them identity doubt. My claim that self-doubt can be a beneficial form of disorientation even for very marginalized individuals requires care: it might seem to be a claim made from a privileged standpoint that overlooks the senses in which self-trust is one of the few resources such individuals possess, and one they cannot afford to give up for the potential benefits of self-doubt. Here is where my detailing of the limits of doubt’s productivity are important: identity doubt can be very difficult to experience while at the same time allowing for liberating processes of identification, new ways of relying on others, and important guards against arrogance. If it seems right to think that those who are oppressed can be socially identified in restrictive ways, and isolated from rich interdependence, we can see how self-doubt can be good even for the downtrodden.

Charlotte’s decision to leave her husband and much of her relational support in pursuit of an artistic career was conditioned by and emerging from her experience of disorientation and it did work to trouble her default scenario of domestic life. The decisions or actions that come directly out of periods of self-doubt are rarely unambiguously ideal. Even so, agents who are able to experience epistemological

disorientations that disrupt their beliefs and actions on the basis of knowledge can become more able to recognize themselves in their lives (i.e., recognizing their identities, skills, capacities for building a life). Those disoriented can also be more likely to be able to respond to dynamic and complex calls to action over time.⁷¹

3. Education

Another set of disoriented experiences can be found in some contexts of education.

Experiences of education where major parts of our understandings of the world are called into question are the most likely to involve epistemological disorientations; the more our everyday lives and practices are based on these understandings, the more likely we are to be disoriented when they are challenged. I take good examples of such learning to be the political epistemological disorientations that can occur in feminist education and the religious epistemological disorientations that can occur in philosophical education.

These examples are by no means exclusive: disorienting education can happen outside of post-secondary settings, classrooms, and circumstances where someone is clearly the teacher and others clearly students. It can also happen in situations when no one intends to learn anything.

⁷¹ Laurie Shrage has suggested to me that doubting one's ethnic identity in particular can be useful insofar as it helps one to be more reflective and intentional in expressing that identity, more aware of the assumptions someone might be making on the basis of one's identity, more open to the ways others might doubt one's identity, more open to transgressing or flexibly inhabiting ethnic traditions, less prone to discount the experiences of others by highlighting harms against one's own ethnic community as unconditionally the worst, less likely to troublingly claim a deep/stable identity core as a source of strength, and better able to notice the privileges that are contingent on ethnic identifications.

There is a sense in which all education will have to do with orientation: what information we can learn depends on what we are oriented towards learning.⁷² If we are oriented towards only creationist understandings of biological origin, we will be unlikely to learn much about the diversity of evolutionary theories; if we are oriented towards only our own urban landscapes, we might be less likely to seek out the kinds of knowledge that can be gained by living rurally. The knowledge we can gain is often limited and conditioned by what aspects of the world we are oriented towards knowing. As Susan Babbitt claims, “How one orients oneself matters to what one understands, and, in some important cases, this orientation must be deliberate and considered, and somewhat against the grain” (Babbitt 2001, 58). Likewise in concrete terms, to pay attention to gaining knowledge about something, we very often have to orient our bodies or perceptions towards it (e.g., towards the car engine to fix, the book to translate, the dough to knead, or the cadaver to dissect). Having said this, part of what interests me about epistemological disorientations is precisely how they can occur when we are confronted with some kind of knowledge that we do not expect. We regularly learn about things we did not see coming when we become disoriented in various contexts of interaction.⁷³ I think Babbitt is right to think that we are most likely to learn what we orient ourselves toward learning, but we also often learn things without first orienting ourselves toward gaining that knowledge, whether that would mean orienting ourselves with or against a particular grain.

⁷² Such a view is reflected in Plato’s *Republic*, at 518D, where education is described as not the putting of sight into blind eyes so much as the turning of an individual’s body toward the light: education as proper reorientation.

⁷³ Warren Heiti has pointed out to me that the aporia of some Socratic dialogues may be good examples of disorientations: when Thrasymachus finds that he is wrong to believe that justice is the advantage of the privileged, he becomes disoriented (as well as angry and embarrassed), and when Meno finds that he can’t confidently deliver impressive speeches about virtue, he too becomes disoriented (as well as bewildered and shocked).

A) Disorientation In Thinking

The history of philosophy supplies surprising resources for understanding how gaining and sustaining knowledge can support feeling deeply *oriented* in our lives and as knowers, often by characterizing the felt experience of lacking knowledge. For example, in “The Fixation of Belief,” Charles Peirce writes, “Let a man venture into an unfamiliar field, or where his results are not continually checked by experience, and all history shows that the most masculine intellect will oftentimes lose his orientation and waste his efforts in directions which bring him no nearer to his goal, or even carry him entirely astray” (Peirce 1955, 8).

Particularly compelling are the first pages of Immanuel Kant’s short piece “What is Orientation in Thinking?” which I read as offering an intriguing historical account of what it is to be epistemologically *oriented*. According to Hans Reiss’ introduction to the essay, we are most likely to feel oriented when we “limit our enquiries to what can, in principle, be discovered to prevent [ourselves] from seeking to discover what is beyond the boundaries of knowledge” (Kant 1991, 236). Kant’s analysis begins with a subtle consideration of what it is to be oriented (in his terms, *orientated*), beginning with orientation in geographically directional terms (i.e., toward horizon, sunrise, north, south, east, and west), before moving to embodied and epistemological orientation: “If I see the sun in the sky and know that it is now midday, I know how to find south, west, north, and east. For this purpose, however, I must necessarily be able to feel a difference within my

own *subject*, namely that between my right and left hands. I call this a *feeling*, because these two sides display no perceptible difference as far as external intuition is concerned” (Kant 1991, 238). Kant takes up the question of orientation in order to ultimately claim that the belief in reason is deeply orienting to our thinking—we need reason in order for our thinking to be oriented. Giving one example of the use of such reason, Kant claims that we need to be able to reason using *a priori* rather than subjective understanding (e.g., to define our own geographical location in relation to stars and constellations “by *a priori* means,” even when our subjective experience contradicts those definitions; Kant 1991, 239), in order to be and feel oriented in thinking. Reason which orients thought is independent from any subjective experience, and our capacities to access such reason are fully contained in our own cognitive abilities; Kant makes this point through a cryptic metaphor of how, even lost in a dark and unfamiliar neighbourhood, I can reorient myself just by “the feeling of difference between my two sides, my right and my left” (Kant 1991, 239).⁷⁴ What I want to highlight as relevant from Kant’s account for my purposes is how well he demonstrates the connection between feeling oriented and having secure epistemological methods; for Kant, only knowledge based on pure reason (as he understands it) can support feeling epistemologically oriented. If these practices of knowing are threatened or undercut, we can feel deeply epistemologically disoriented. In answering the question of ‘what is orientation in thinking?’ Kant also shows how strenuous it can be to be disoriented in thought.

Far from all educational experiences involve epistemological disorientation. Many of the things we learn are mundane, or in keeping with the general knowledge we

⁷⁴ Martin Heidegger takes up Kant’s of orientation analysis in BT 109-110.

already possess, or new but sufficiently non-disruptive to our lives. Often our ways of knowing and learning pull away from epistemological disorientations, towards the centre of whatever paradigmatic framework we already have, as our bodies do towards postures that put us most at ease. Charles Peirce accounts for why this is:

The force of habit will sometimes cause a man to hold on to old beliefs, after he is in a condition to see that they have no sound basis...Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief; while the latter is a calm and satisfactory state which we do not wish to avoid...We cling tenaciously, not merely to believing, but to believing just what we do believe. (Peirce 1955, 21, 10)

Many accounts of political education are good examples of educations that reorient rather than disorient.⁷⁵

B) Clicks And Soundwaves

The December 20th 1971 issue of *New York* magazine featured an insert that previewed *Ms. Magazine*, a new publication for women. The insert included an article entitled “The Housewife’s Moment of Truth,” in which Jane O’Reilly describes attending a workshop that aimed at revealing how gender plays into the roles and characteristics of sexual behaviour. Participants were asked to meditate and eventually develop an image of what

⁷⁵ Very often, educators further guide processes of learning towards maintaining orientation. As Phaedo describes Socrates’ pedagogical practice, “I have certainly often admired Socrates Echecrates, but never more than on this occasion. That he had a reply was perhaps not strange. What I wondered at most in him was the pleasant, kind, and admiring way he received the young men’s argument, and how sharply he was aware of the effect the discussion had on us, and then how well he healed our distress and, as it were, recalled us from our flight and defeat and turned us around to join him in the examination of their argument” (Plato *Phaedo*, margin 89).

sort of animal best expressed their sexual selfhood, and then to form small groups and discuss their animal identifications. Many of the women's animals were small and domesticated—cats and birds—and many of the men's were wilder and more powerful. Following one woman's description of herself as a fangless, chameleonic snake whose only protection was to change color and blend in with the environment, O'Reilly recalls a moment of shared awareness:

The women in the group looked at her, looked at each other and...click! A moment of truth. The shock of recognition. Instant sisterhood. 'You became a *housewife*,' we said, excited, together, turning to the men to see if they understood...the click! of recognition, that parenthesis of truth around a little thing that completes the puzzle of reality in women's minds—the moment that brings a gleam to our eyes and means the revolution has begun. (O'Reilly 1971)

The 'click' of new knowledge might be described as a lightbulb going on, or as an 'aha' moment.⁷⁶ O'Reilly's description of such moments is rich: they can settle truths as complete, secure interpersonal recognition, spur solidarity, create positive emotions, and start social movements. When such understandings 'click' into place, they can *reorient us*, bringing pieces of information together into a framework by which they confirm each other and embolden our new understanding as the best interpretation of data. Note the similarity of some 'click experience' to Jaggar's view of what outlaw emotions do—they orient us to a new way of understanding a given situation or set of experiences. The benefits of such experiences should not be underestimated: education that leads to

⁷⁶ Babbitt references a passage from Kathleen Okruhlik's analysis of these experiences: "[Okruhlik] says we experience the power and beauty of unity all the time: 'Many of those 'clicks' in the early issues of *Ms.* were the sounds made by unifying conceptions falling into place. Sometimes a single concept like the 'eroticisation of subordination' makes many disconnected experiences fall into place and become understandable'" (Babbitt 2001, 91; citing a presentation of Okruhlik's paper "Feminism and Realism").

reorientation often provides better ways of knowing than ones we have had in the past. ‘Click’ experience can indicate that I have found my experience clearly reflected in another person’s account, leading to a powerful feeling of recognition and, sometimes, increased possibilities for subversion and solidarity in action towards needs we may share. Having said this, education does not always help our perceptions of the world and ourselves fall cleanly or completely into place, nor does it always create ‘clicks’ of orientation; and it can be productive even when it does not. Click experiences are not always orienting in the way the article indicates, of course, and many second-wave accounts of coming to recognize oppression express the more nuanced ways that ‘clicks’ can accumulate and move us toward self-doubt and disorientation. When multiple ‘clicks’ build up to bring out, for example, my sexuality, marriage, workplace, and economic status as something other than what I had thought, the effects can be powerfully disorienting. Our webs of belief can become disrupted, and we can struggle to trust that any of our perceptions of self and world are as we thought they were.

A different model for disorientations of education can be clarified by the example of a student I had in a second-year class on Philosophy of Sex and Love. I was lecturing on a section in Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*, where Ahmed discusses how being queer in heteronormative social contexts can feel like being left-handed in a society that builds everything for right-handed people: a constant stretching to meet tools that don’t fit your body. At the front of our lecture hall, I had two students describe what it was like to reach to use desks that weren’t built for them; a right-handed desk for a left-handed student, a left-handed desk for a right handed student. Being queer, they agreed with

Ahmed, can lead to repetitive strain injury. After the class, a quiet student came from the back of the class to speak with me. She was queer, she said, and thanked me, saying that Ahmed's example and description had "hit her like a soundwave." The 'soundwave' experience indicates something about feeling overwhelmed: a student finds herself bowled over by a new understanding in a way which carries meaning *with and beyond* her experience. That is, she learns in a way which at the same time resonates and astonishes, perhaps in part by how well it resonates with experience of hers that she had not yet even identified as needing consideration. We can note how epistemological dimensions of disorientation work alongside corporeal and affective dimensions here: the soundwave experience seems to involve seems to resonate on bodily and emotional levels, perhaps of relief, recognition, and feeling at home in unexpected (and therefore disorienting) ways. The exchange was not just indicative of my student's disorientation—it was also disorienting to me. I had not known to anticipate the power of that lesson, was humbled in the face of how simple points in theory can resonate so well with the experiences of readers, and was moved by my student's bravery and articulateness, thinking back to important moments in my first university courses when I too had felt that sort of soundwave of understanding. Epistemological disorientation can happen in soundwave experiences in part because they do not always 'close the case' of providing what information is needed, instructing what action is called for. Rather, they point toward all the information we may not even yet know we or others need, suggesting that the parallel question of what action is called for may need to remain open. Having said this, just as 'click experiences' are not always troublingly orienting, neither are soundwave experiences always fruitfully disorienting: soundwaves can help make sense

of things very quickly; even when they bowl us over with a new framework for understanding ourselves, they may be so powerful as to eclipse the nuance of particular explanations, glossing over the ways in which most explanations cannot reflect the experience of all (e.g., queer) people in all social settings.

Some educations change how we physically and emotionally feel and engage with others; epistemological disorientations can open up our habits of feeling and engagement to possible changes. Clicks and soundwaves might be thought of on a spectrum of educational experiences; both can be important in leading us to learn information and new methods of accessing knowledge, both are at times orienting and at times disorienting. To involve epistemological disorientation, educational experiences must disrupt understandings that are formative or foundational for how we understand ourselves, our communities, and our worlds. Given that typically such understandings involve complex relations of propositional and non-propositional knowledge, the epistemological disorientations of education tend to be experienced on the levels of both kinds of knowing.

Particular kinds of education can be profoundly disorienting when they not only call into question the facts or interpretations we have understood within particular paradigms, but more when they challenge the systems of understanding that support our action. We sometimes find these multiple levels of disorientations in feminist or philosophical classrooms: when students encounter a description of structural injustice, intersecting oppressions, or Marilyn Frye's account of the double bind (Frye 1983) for

the first time, they can become disoriented in thinking. Members of marginalized groups in particular can experience shifts in their ways of thinking in both past and future directions: reinterpreting past experience and understandings, and trying to anticipate how the new knowledge might shift understandings of their future experiences. They can do so even when unable to identify the understanding they had previously held, and/or without knowledge of what precisely is different about their new understanding.⁷⁷

Likewise, when students encounter the extent of Plato's influence on medieval philosophy (and thus on Christianity), or read Nietzsche for the first time, they can become disoriented in the context of previously held religious beliefs. Learning about oppression or religion in these ways can change practice: after feminist classrooms, students may leave relationships, change careers, or alter habits of buying clothing; after environmental studies classes, students may eat, travel, and clean differently. After philosophical classrooms, students may stop participating in some religious communities, start participating in others, or change understandings of how to act in light of religious doctrines about the environment or other people. Returning to the multiple levels on which epistemological disorientations can be disruptive, we can see how education can disorient us at the level of what we know about ourselves and the world: it can disorient the ways we know (e.g., whose knowledge we learn/teach); the feelings connected to particular knowledge (e.g., our level of attachment to what we know); our capacities to act on the basis of knowledge (e.g., to 'translate' knowledge into recommendations or practice); and at our identities as knowers (e.g., as experts on our own experience). The

⁷⁷ Judgment can be needed before we can get to a position of self-doubt: sometimes we need to formulate a judgment (e.g., about something as repugnant), before we can doubt that judgment or our capacities as judge, and thereby get to transformed thought (Jaarsma 2009).

disorientations triggered by education have not only epistemological but also corporeal and affective levels, as when feelings of security, ease, and trust are disrupted in educational contexts.

In addition to the disorientations of education, I have also recently noticed the ways in which stages of academic theorizing can be disorienting as well: in processes of revising or defending written work, applying for academic programs or jobs, and submitting grant proposals, the work involved in forming connections from our projects to the needs of a publication, program, department, or granting council can spur significant epistemological disorientations. By compelling us to show others the significance of our work, they give opportunities for questioning, clarifying, or revising its significance for ourselves. The processes of taking stock in every case have some effects on the content of our projects, and may prompt us to question our sources for gaining knowledge, or motivations for doing so, as well as sometimes even prompting questions of our professional self-worth or intellectual capacities. These stages of justifying, promoting, or making our work known to others do not happen only once we have completed projects; they can occur at any point in the development of projects, and even the experiences of becoming distanced from the content of our research can be disorienting (i.e., from up close detailing arguments or examples, to explaining the disciplinary orientation or research methods used, to gaining approval from ethics committees or explaining the relevance of the research to university, private, and public supporters). While the disorientations involved in these processes, it seems, can make academics more resistant to taking on the challenges of extra disruptions (e.g.,

interdisciplinary work, moving between disciplines, moving back and forth between primarily teaching or primarily administrative roles), framing disorientations as important parts of academic work can also allow us to benefit more from them. We might be more likely to respond to criticisms from those in other disciplines, shape projects which complement rather than ignore or duplicate others' work, and cultivate humility about the scope and centrality of our expertise.

Epistemological disorientations can be important for processes of education in part for the ways they can spur us to want to know more and better. To return to Peirce:

Some philosophers have imagined that to start an inquiry it was only necessary to utter a question whether orally or by setting it down on paper, and have even recommended us to begin our studies with questioning everything! But the mere putting of a proposition into the interrogative form does not stimulate the mind to any struggle after belief. There must be a real and living doubt, and without this all discussion is idle. (Peirce 1955, 11)

Having said this, I am most interested in the effects disorientations of education have on the multiple layers of what kinds of knowledge (including whose knowledge) we take ourselves to have access to, and how we go about accessing, communicating, and acting on the basis of such knowledge. Recent work in the literature on epistemologies of ignorance provides some good examples of such disruptions (Sullivan and Tuana 2007): coming to realize my own ignorance about a given dimension of experience can disorient me and compel me to change how I think about expertise. Some of the most important

kinds of education can be those which make us more aware of and responsible for our various levels of ignorance.

C) Pedagogies Of Disorientation

The ways in which different models and practices of educating anticipate and respond to epistemological disorientations give some indication of how much they build in disorientations as productive rather than merely disruptive parts of learning. There might be a useful difference here between *education* and *training*: training might be learning that leads to skill-development, and education might involve experiences which challenge commitments and spur re-positioning as agents. As many educators know, students can be very disoriented by courses that leave them with more questions than answers. Capacities to help create safe environments for disorientation might be built into the job of the educator. Models of education that attempt to frame all new knowledge only in terms of what we have learned in the past, or which specify only those concepts which are obviously and directly relevant to our specific experiences are likely shaped by the assumption that the best processes of learning are the most orienting and those which put knowers at ease. By contrast, models of education that introduce unfamiliar examples, involving experiences that students have not known about before, drawing unexpected analyses into conversation and suggesting the need to propose and clarify new concepts (even when doing so will involve more time and an initial lack of clarity) are more likely shaped by a vision of the potential use of felt disorientation for education. We see examples of this in many feminist classrooms, which use testimonies from marginalized

voices as main course texts (e.g., Sojourner Truth's speech) in ways which are often disorienting.

Megan Boler (1999) aims to characterize a *pedagogy of discomfort*, which “invites students to leave the familiar shores of learned beliefs and habits and swim further out into the ‘foreign’ and risky depths of the sea of ethical and moral differences” (Boler 1999, 181). A pedagogy of discomfort is structured by awareness of the ways we have been taught to practice finding certain things morally relevant (reacting with emotion and action). Boler frames these as “inscribed habits of (in)attention,” claiming that “The aim of discomfort is for each person, myself included, to explore beliefs and value; to examine when visual ‘habits’ and emotional selectivity have become rigid and immune to flexibility; and to identify when and how our habits harm ourselves and others” (Boler 1999, 180, 185-186; see also Houston 2002 and Friere 1973). Here, Boler characterizes discomfort as more ends-oriented than I have characterized disorientation: more often, disorientation itself does not have an aim, and it can become part of experiences of learning in ways which surprise even those educators who would view it as useful. But I agree with Boler that part of what disorientations can allow for are these shifts in cognitive and reflective habits—though they rarely do so immediately, directly, or intentionally. As in other cases of epistemological disorientation which prompt feelings of powerlessness and efforts to clarify what is in my power to know, pedagogies of discomfort importantly cue us to dynamics of power in practices of knowing. Enriched awareness of power is just one of the ways that classrooms are, of course, disorienting to us as instructors as well as to our students. The educational experiences which interest

Boler often involve both efforts to raise consciousness and to acknowledge what we cannot know. Boler claims that “An ethical aim of a pedagogy of discomfort is willingly to inhabit a more ambiguous and flexible sense of self. My hope is that we are able to extend our ethical language and sense of possibilities beyond a reductive model of ‘guilt vs. innocence’” (Boler 1999, 176); I return to her suggestions about what pedagogies of discomfort can teach us about ethics in particular in the next chapter. For now, I am highlighting that Boler emphasizes how pedagogies of discomfort can be politically useful, and claiming that the epistemological disorientations they involve are part of what make them so.

Two feminist theorists help further distinguish further ways in which contexts of education can be deeply disorienting, apart from the model of learning as something which disorients us against a background of having felt oriented. Dorothy Allison and Christine Overall describe the disorientations of being working-class entering university classrooms shaped by middle-class norms. When Allison moves with her family from her hometown in South Carolina to a new community in Central Florida less aware of her family’s class status and history, she is given a clean slate at her new school:

Suddenly I was boosted into the college-bound track, and while there was plenty of contempt for my inept social skills, pitiful wardrobe, and slow drawling accent, there was also something I had never experienced before: a protective anonymity, and a kind of grudging respect and curiosity about who I might become...I also experienced a new level of fear, a fear of losing what had never before been

imaginable. Don't let me lose this chance, I prayed, and lived in terror that I might suddenly be seen again as what I knew myself to be. (Allison 1994, 21)

In college, Allison feels uneasy, unable to be honest about her past or its effects on her identity:

I copied the dress, mannerisms, attitudes, and ambitions of the girls I met in college, changing or hiding my own tastes, interests, and desires...I explained to friends that I went home so rarely because my stepfather and I fought too much for me to be comfortable in his house...The truth was that I feared the person I might become in my mama's house, the woman of my dreams—hateful, violent, and hopeless. It is hard to explain how deliberately and thoroughly I ran away from my own life. I did not forget where I came from, but I gritted my teeth and hid it.

(Allison 1994. 22)

Overall, too, entered university from a working-class background, and found her experience complicated by her lack of experience with academic contexts beforehand; she had no experience talking with professors, doing research in a library, attending university social events, or finding appropriate summer jobs (Overall 1998, 119). Being in university classrooms was unsettling:

It is not surprising that, after being a non-stop talker all through primary and secondary school, on my working-class home turf, I became completely silent at university and only slowly, painfully, regained my voice when I saw that speaking out was part of the price of success. [My conflictedness was] between the sense of false superiority/uniqueness at having been smart enough to escape from the

working class into academia and the feeling of being a scholastic fraud, a working-class bull in the university china shop. (Overall 1998, 119)

Overall proceeded through academe, eventually to a position as a tenured, full professor of philosophy, and still highlights the disorienting experience of class in the university context:

I experience a recurrent and shameful envy of my middle-class students, especially the well-groomed, knowledgeable, confident young middle-class women who are able to take for granted their right to be at the university and their ability to function well there...I never felt that I knew the academic rules—especially the unwritten ones—well enough to participate as an equal with my supposed peers. I had to learn, slowly and painfully, to ‘pass’ as middle class. (Overall 1998, 114, 119)

So it is not only true that education can prompt disorientations through our experiences of learning; just being in educational contexts can be disorienting when we have not envisioned ourselves as capable of being there. Marginalized students may not need to be made ill at ease in pedagogical contexts: they may be disoriented by the contexts themselves, and in need of support and guidance as in other situations of disorientation in the classroom.

It should be clear by now how my vision of education is distinct from Kant’s: Kant supports as much felt orientation as possible (i.e., coordinating our habits of thought as much as we can with pure reason), outlining the role of education as follows:

To think for oneself means to look within oneself (i.e., in one’s own reason) for the supreme touchstone of truth; and the maxim of thinking for oneself at all times is

enlightenment...To employ one's own reason means simply to ask oneself, whenever one is urged to accept something, whether one finds it possible to transform the reason for accepting it, or the rule which follows from what is accepted, into a universal principle governing the use of one's reason...It is consequently very easy to lay the basis of enlightenment in *individual subjects* by means of education; one must merely begin at an early stage to accustom young minds to this reflection. (Kant 1991, 249 ft.)

Likewise, for the man lost in an unfamiliar field of thought, Peirce recommends some general education to reorient: "He is like a ship in the open sea, with no one on board who understands the rules of navigation. And in such a case some general study of the guiding principles of reasoning would be sure to be found useful" (Peirce 1955, 8). Kant and Peirce are both interested in education that leads to felt orientation.

In her chapter on "The Risks of Empathy," Boler provides a good example of how some experiences of even provocative and difficult educations can turn out to be troublingly orienting overall. She describes how students experienced:

a deceptive 'ah-hah!' moment while reading Art Spiegelman's *MAUS* [a graphic novel about surviving the holocaust in the Second World War]...Passive empathy did not engage them in an encounter with strangeness, with the uncanny; did not throw into question what they felt they knew. The readers experienced an untroubled identification that did not create estrangement or unfamiliarity. Rather, passive empathy allowed them familiarity, 'insight', and 'clear imagination' of

historical occurrences—and finally, a cathartic, innocent, and I would argue voyeuristic sense of closure. (Boler1999 177, 169)

I am suggesting that the epistemological disorientations of education can be productive not just in prompting us to seek more knowledge, and not just insofar as they can help us return to more oriented ways of thinking; rather, insofar as they can narrow the scope of what we think we already, can, or should, know, humble us as students and teachers, raise questions about whose knowledge is taken as standard, and challenge what should count as the best practices of gaining or testing knowledge. In addition to all this, disorientations of education that cultivate capacities for critical engagement can also be empowering. Although some of these points echo feminist accounts of consciousness raising, I am suggesting that some moments of ‘brink’ in such processes – after old understandings are disrupted and before new ones are suggested as replacements or reorientations – can be productive in ways distinct from eventual raised consciousnesses themselves. As in all the cases of felt disorientation I discuss, insofar as they allow for radical change and indeterminate outcomes, such ‘brinks’ also have the potential to lead to negative reorientations.⁷⁸ If educators recognize the fragility of such moments of disorientation, we might be more likely to guard against flippancy, arrogance, and bulldozing behaviour of students in such moments; if we recognize the promise of such moments, we might be more likely to practice the kind of teaching that can carefully bring them about.

⁷⁸ In chapter two, this was discussed in the context of trauma victims sometimes being more likely to continue cycles of abuse than to break them. It is true that disorientations of education can be used to turn individuals into, for example, better killing machines in contexts of war. As I have claimed throughout, whether disorientations allow for beneficial or harmful developments in processes of moral agency depends largely on the social environment and commitments of the individual. I do not deny the common view that disorientations can lead to negative effects, I just deny that they always or necessarily do so by virtue of the characteristics inherent to them.

4. Disorientation, Stability, And Decisiveness

In this chapter so far I have characterized disorientations triggered by processes of knowledge formation, revision, and application, and drawn on experiences of intense self-doubt and particular educations as illustrative examples of how such disorientations involve epistemological alongside corporeal and affective dimensions. I now want to further specify what epistemological disorientations are by considering how they interact with select cognitive processes of agency outlined by other philosophers. My main claims are: a) the epistemological disorientations of both self-doubt and education can function to disrupt both processes of generating reliable expectations and the reflections on our preferences/desires that leads to decisive action, and b) these disruptions are not exclusively detrimental for agents overall capacities for responsible action. The first part of the claim echoes my challenge to de Sousa's view of emotions in the last chapter: as emotions can be seen as settling the salience of objects and actions, so too can processes of self-knowledge and belief acquisition establish expectations and help order our preferences. Disorientations can both unsettle salience and disrupt expectations and desires. I have claimed that epistemological disorientations tend to disrupt *what* we know, *how* we know, *how we feel* about our knowledge, *whether or how* we act on the basis of knowledge, and *who* we take ourselves to be as knowers. I want to suggest that these disruptions can have beneficial effects on the ways individuals expect, reflect, and act.

Returning to the question of what kind of processes of knowing get disrupted in epistemological disorientations, I maintain that it is most helpful to think in terms of both propositional and non-propositional knowledge being disrupted in situations of disruption. We might think that when our processes of propositional knowledge get disrupted by disorientations, non-propositional knowledge is likely to kick in as a tool of reorientation; e.g., when I cannot discern what my preferences are in light of two competing options for action, I could trust a ‘gut feeling’ that one is better than the other; or when I cannot make sense of why I might be feeling uncomfortable as a black man in the presence of all white people, I could know in a complex way, from my embodied experience, that my discomfort is the result of racism.⁷⁹ I want to emphasize though, alongside my critique of Jaggar on ‘outlaw emotions’ in chapter three, that the epistemological disorientations that interest me at both propositional and non-propositional levels do not tend to cue us immediately to any awareness, about either what has triggered them or what we are called to do as a result of them. We might think back to the discussion of Fanon in chapter one: even though he knew how to recognize racism, and was deeply invested in anti-racist politics, the racism of his exchange with the white man disoriented him in body, affect, and cognition and did not cue him immediately to any course of resistance. Such cueing might happen sometimes in sensuous knowledge, as a form of reorientation. I am interested in the experiences of disorientation that do not cue us to any immediate understanding or course of action, so much as they change our way of being, feeling, reflecting, and acting in productive ways not always or centrally aimed at repairing whatever triggered the disorientation in the

⁷⁹ In this sense, sensuous knowledge might be seen as valuable chiefly for its capacity to alert us to harms, as in the case of consciousness raising about sexual harassment described in Fricker 2007, 150-152.

first place. I am interested in the benefits of staying with disorientations as they stay with us.

A) Expectation

One set of cognitive shifts that can be spurred by epistemological disorientations are shifts in expectation. Thinking back to the case of Gilman, we can see how in cases of self-doubt, serious epistemological disorientations led to feelings of loss and instability: what we once thought we knew about ourselves becomes uncertain. The development of self-knowledge generates expectations, for example, by giving me reasons to expect on the basis of memory and imagination that I will tend to act in similar ways when faced with similar situations. Depending on how well I think I know myself, I can expect that I will continue to act according to tendencies and preferences that are unlikely to surprise me. In situations of severe self-doubt, our employment of expectation on both levels is likely to be disrupted. And as we have seen in cases of education, epistemological disorientations can further shift expectations by uprooting not only the expectations that we might be able to describe or recognize (e.g., the expectation that hard work will benefit us and laziness will not), but also the expectation that our basic knowledge of the world will be sustained, that is, that understandings we hold dear—that the taken-for-granted which doesn't seem learned will not (or cannot) be unlearned (e.g., that my family will always support me, that a religious figure exists, that the justice system is reliable). When knowledge that at one time seemed more fundamental or obvious than could ever have been taught is unlearned or made contingent by education, our

expectations can be deeply disrupted. We might find it difficult to take anything for granted, or to expect that what has been true in our experience until now will continue to be true.

We can see the disruption of expectation at work both in experiences of doubt (e.g., Descartes, Gilman), and experiences of education (e.g., in clicks and soundwaves). The disruption of expectation that can occur in epistemological disorientations is particularly important given how deeply expectations structure and regulate our lives. Susan Babbitt's and Sue Campbell's accounts of expectation helps clarify why this is so; for Babbitt, expectations generate capacities for control, stability, and self-integration, and the disruption of expectations can lead individuals to feel they have lost control of themselves and the situations they are in. Expectations shape more than our epistemological experience: when our expectations about the world are confirmed, so too can our body habits become more comfortable and our affective states more settled. As Campbell explains the disruption of expectation in grief:

The experience of self-anxiety in grief depends on our nature as expectant and social...The task of the mourner is not simply to form new expectations adjusted to present knowledge in an old environment. It is the more complex task of readjusting an environment of people, places and memories so as to establish a renewed, reliable ground of expectation.⁸⁰ (Campbell "Grief, Expectation, and the Unified Self," 14)

⁸⁰ Disrupted expectations can both initiate and result from disorientations: in Sue Campbell's framework of 'settled expectations' (1999), we can see how disorientations could unsettle what I expect for my life or the life of my community in ways which make it difficult to go on.

The communities and institutions we are involved in for the most part help generate and maintain expectations. As Babbitt explains, “In order to have the right sort of control over an event, we need to know what can constitute an adequate or inadequate response. When there is a model, or an institution, there are rules for adequacy and, as Searle points out, expectations, obligations, rights, and responsibilities generated by rules and practices” (Babbitt 2001, 72-73). One major level of disorientation can occur when expectations are unsettled or thwarted. Babbitt highlights the role of expectation in disorientation, claiming that “Disorientation has to do, in part, with failure to be able to order experiences...What is disrupted is one’s trust in the patterns of interaction, both social and non-social, that give rise to one’s expectations” (Babbitt 2001, 68). A second layer of epistemological disorientation relies on the first: namely, the sense not only of having one’s expectations disrupted, but also lacking any persistent desire to prevent such disruption or re-establish new expectations. Babbitt draws on Brison’s account of trauma to frame this second sense: “One might have thought that the disorientation consists in loss of expectations of control based upon past experience. In fact, what is disorienting is the failure to find relevantly valuable the loss of that sort of control. That is, what is disorienting is failure of the relationship between expectations of control and actual, interesting, stability of self” (Babbitt 2001, 69). Disorientation is connected to disrupted expectation in both directions: disorientations can disrupt expectations and disrupted expectations are often disorienting. The disorientations that result from trauma can not only deplete our expectations of control over our lives, but also reduce the extent to which we associate having such control with being ourselves. Disruptions in expectation at both these levels can be deeply disorienting.

Babbitt is one of my most important interlocutors on the question of epistemological disorientation, particularly as she is one of the few epistemologists to take disorientation seriously and to offer an analysis of how it relates to a crucial topic in epistemology through her account of expectation. She is interested in disorientations of expectation as just part of the story of selves who are unified by specific kinds of transformative commitments and actions (Babbitt 2001, 95). I am interested in the value of these disorientations apart from questions about whether or how they help us to reorient in the long-term. I return often to this distinction—between valuing disorientations for how they can reorient (as Babbitt does) and valuing disorientations apart from how they can reorient (as I do)—because I think there is something important that can be lost when disorientation’s promise is attached too closely to reorientation, for both agents and theorists: the idea of disorientation’s promise is in effect jumped over in the interest of identifying reorientation strategies. In the context of epistemology, for knowers, too much commitment to epistemological reorientation means that less space will be available for us to *experience* periods of self-doubt and education, and thus to benefit from the ways they can expand our possibilities for understanding, interest, decision, and action. Jumping too quickly from a mistaken knowledge to a new knowledge neglects the way periods of uncertainty can make us more curious, critical, or cautious knowers overall. For theorists of knowledge, too much commitment to epistemological reorientation neglects what is promising about knowers realizing what they do not and cannot know. As Robert Bernasconi explains Sartre’s racial ignorance in the writing of “Black Orpheus,” the goal is not always to act on whatever knowledge we

have: “[Sartre] had forgotten his own ignorance and he had forgotten too that pervasive sense of ignorance that often accompanies action. The agent’s knowledge of a situation is as much defined by the blind spots as by what is visible, and to rush in prematurely and define the meaning of action distorts that aspect of it” (Bernasconi 2007, 232).

B) Reflection And Decision

In addition to disrupting expectations, epistemological disorientations can be characterized by the way they unsettle processes of reflection, and particularly the cognitive processes surrounding how we reflect on and deliberate about our needs, desires, and preferences. One of the ways in which epistemological disorientations complicate what we think we know is by making it very difficult to discern what we want in particular situations. Disorientations disrupt the way we reflect on our preferences sometimes by confusing what options are open to us, sometimes by clouding our understanding of how each option would affect the rest of our lives and preferences into the future, sometimes by dulling our capacities to recognize what we are interested in, and sometimes by generating apathy about all of our options.⁸¹ Both our desires and the processes of deliberating among them can be disabled or delayed by epistemological disorientations. Disorienting experiences of both self-doubt and education can have such effects.⁸²

⁸¹ Disorientation can also make us speechless—unable to describe our processes of reflection to others, and thereby to communicate in ways which clarify what we are thinking. Disorientation might sometimes disrupt the narrative capacities required to give accounts of ourselves in Butler’s sense (see Butler 2005, 13) – we can lack the capacities to recognize ourselves in our lives at all (as in Gilman’s case), which can make it very difficult to position ourselves within a particular narrative.

⁸² If my conceptual points are right, it becomes important to ask practical questions about the best ways for self-doubt and educations to be guided experiences that lead to productive rather than destructive

Processes of reflecting on our desires and deliberating among them are crucially important for our capacities to be agents in the way we want to be and to shape the agential lives we take ourselves to be responsible for shaping.⁸³ In “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” Harry Frankfurt establishes the importance of decision making for autonomy and agency. He highlights processes of ‘making up one’s mind’ as functioning as conflict resolution (Frankfurt 1987, 41-42), wherever possible ordering hierarchies within desire, establishing priorities and commitments among sets of first and second order preferences, and in cases of persistent conflict, deliberately establishing the self’s association with one set of preferences and dissociation from its contraries. When such processes are successful, “that person is no longer uncertain which side he is on, in the conflict between the two desires, and the persistence of this conflict need not subvert or diminish the wholeheartedness of his commitment to the desire with which he identifies” (Frankfurt 1987, 40).⁸⁴ Decisive selves deal with inevitable internal conflict not by expelling one of the causes of the conflict, Frankfurt claims, so much as by dissociating itself from whichever desires conflict with the decision they have made:

The making of a decision appears to differ from the self-reparative activities of the body, which in some ways it resembles. When the body heals itself, it *eliminates*

disorientations, leading to better modes of expecting and reflecting. Boler establishes some practical avenues on the question of education.

⁸³ Hilary Kornblith describes how processes of reflection involve investigating reasons for belief: “We often scrutinize our reasons for belief after the fact. When we do this, we begin by determining what our reasons for holding a belief come to, and we then consider the logical credentials of our reasons. When they are good reasons, we continue to hold the belief, and when they are not good reasons, we come to give up the belief. Our reasons are, for the most part, easily available to introspection, and the activity of considering our reasons is thus deeply implicated in the fixation of belief in a way that guides it toward the truth” (Kornblith 1999, 185-186).

⁸⁴ Frankfurt’s model is based more on an understanding of ambivalence (as discussed in chapter three) than of affective disorientation. Epistemological disorientations should be understood as disrupting both deliberative and executive stages of action (to the extent that some decision theorists might distinguish the two).

conflicts in which one physical process (say, infection) interferes with others and undermines the homeostasis or equilibrium in which health consists. A person who makes up his mind also seeks thereby to overcome or to supersede a condition of inner division and to make himself into an integrated whole. But he may accomplish this without actually eliminating the desires that conflict with those upon which he has decided, as long as he dissociates himself from them. (Frankfurt 1987, 42)

We often do the work of identifying desires by trying to identify our affective responses to imagining their fulfillment: e.g., to determine if I want ‘x’, I might try to imagine my potential emotional response to ‘x’ coming to pass, or not coming to pass. If we cannot successfully identify affect regarding potential objects of desire, it is difficult to think of where we are located in Frankfurt’s framework, whose ground-level starts with clear but conflicting desires. Affective disorientations where we cannot identify how we are feeling, very often overlap with or involve the epistemological disorientations of failures to identify preferences. The tensions of such disorientations thus run deeper than the ambivalence Frankfurt aims to argue against. He does not have suggestions, for example, for the agent who can identify neither her preferences nor her emotions, apart from intense swells of felt conflict.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Frankfurt takes his argument about agency through dissociation with conflicting desires to be a more specific articulation of what he calls an ‘obscure’ earlier formation: “When a person identifies himself *decisively* with one of his first-order desires, this commitment ‘resounds’ throughout the potentially endless array of higher orders” (Frankfurt 1987, 35; quoting from his 1971 article “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”). It seems to me, in fact, that the earlier formation better reflects felt agency, and how affective orientation can play in: when we feel oriented, we can feel like our commitments harmonize and sync with one another, making our overall experience of agency and decision feel more like the resonance Frankfurt describes. Such resonance can be pleasurable, and the contentment of such felt orientedness can be good for us as agents. Having said this, a desire to maintain such felt resonance at all

It has been suggested to me that in some cases, an individual might deliberately cultivate experiences of disorientation precisely because she knows that being disoriented in decision-making processes can generate better decisions just by virtue of the additional attention they require—this is an interesting suggestion about the possibility of ‘auto-disorientation’.⁸⁶ Such scenarios may fit best within the framework of felt disorientations that can improve agency if they at some point exceed her expectations and/or control, though as I claimed in section two, disorientations need not be wholly out of our control in order to benefit us. It is naive to think that we can control whether or how we experience disorientation, but I am also committed to investigating ways in which we can be open to engaging in disorientations. Epistemological disorientations which we ourselves pursue or take on can affect us in ways we do not anticipate. Recall how the Cartesian model of disorientation within a controlled environment and with the ultimate goal of reorientation differs from the disorientations that interest me: the felt experience of disorientation can be different if we know how it is going to end, and (as I argue in fuller form in the next chapter) it is the felt experience of disorientation that allows for the benefits for moral agency. It is certainly true that we can trigger what we think of as disorientations for ourselves in a number of different ways, for any number of reasons, thinking we can anticipate how difficult they will be, or how they will compare with past disorientations.⁸⁷ Sometimes we *can* anticipate these things, and the experience can

costs can prevent us from engaging with the risk and indeterminacy that sometimes accompanies and spurs moral change.

⁸⁶ Thanks to Duncan MacIntosh for this conversation.

⁸⁷ Of course we can also imagine morally obnoxious, self-indulgent disorientations: e.g., the depressed friend who becomes obsessively self-reflective in the process of therapy. We tend to think it is a good thing that Martin Luther King got out of bed to give his speeches. For the most part though, experienced

focus our attention in rumination or inspire more interest than we previously had in recognizing and ranking desires, and in that way, they can be helpful for our processes of reflection and deliberation. My point, to be more fully argued in the next two chapters, is that when experiences of disorientation partly exceed our will, they stand to benefit us in the moral ways that interest me.

On some understandings of the necessary conditions for agency, it might look like severe epistemological disorientations would almost always threaten or hinder agents' position and possibilities for action. If we accept roughly the views of agency proposed by relational autonomy theorists, however, we can see how disorientations should be understood as generating shifts in agency, rather than total debilitation. The shared agency that might result when disoriented individuals need to rely heavily on others for support and joint deliberation can be dangerous in cases where the others we rely on are powerful and interested in taking advantage of our vulnerability. But this danger is situational rather than inherent to the more relational agency that can be spurred by experiences of disorientation. As I clarify in chapter seven, the benefits of disorientation are of course also situational, dependent in part on the kinds of people we have around us.

Frankfurt's early account of the importance of decisiveness in the face of ambivalence or conflicting desires is often taken as standard: it might seem obvious that an agent racked with conflict will be less able to act decisively and well than one who can dissociate from conflicting desires. An agent who acts wholeheartedly seems better off

disorientations are not something agents revel in, at least not those agents who, at bottom, want to act and live as well and happily as they can.

than one who faces perpetual turmoil of will.⁸⁸ Calhoun (1995) troubles this picture, offering an analysis of wholeheartedness as an ideal rather than necessary condition of integrity: “As agents, we might wish we could be wholehearted about what we do. But being of two minds might not make what we do any less ours and thus might not pose any special threat to integrity...Integrity may sometimes in fact require resisting the impulse to resolve inconsistencies and ambivalence” (Calhoun 1995, 238). The later Frankfurt further nuances experiences of turmoil (Frankfurt 1999, 2004, 2006), highlighting complexities of how in situations of *volitional necessity*, agents can find some acts of will impossible to perform (Frankfurt 1999, 80), in ways which are actually manifestations of who they are, but in a more complicated way than we see in situations of wholeheartedness (e.g., a mother who believes it would be best to give up her child for adoption, but cannot bring herself to do so). Frankfurt’s later pieces take up questions which resonate even more closely with mine: what can we learn about agency from investigating moments in agents’ lives when they cannot act in straightforward ways, or when they do not know how to go on? As Frankfurt summarizes his project in *The Reasons of Love*:

The topics to which this book is devoted have to do with the ordinary conduct of life. They pertain, in one way or another, to a question that is both ultimate and preliminary: how should a person live? ...The difficulties we encounter in thinking about these things may sometimes, perhaps, make us dizzy. They are more likely, however, to cause us to feel troubled, restless, and dissatisfied with ourselves...When we seek to understand the world of nature, we do so at least

⁸⁸ As I clarify further in the next chapter, I think Frankfurt gets this partly from the legacy of Kant’s understanding of ethical strength.

partly in the hope that this will enable us to live within it more comfortably...In our attempts to settle questions concerning how to live, on the other hand, what we are hoping for is the more intimate comfort of feeling at home with ourselves.

(Frankfurt 2004, 5)

My project diverges from Frankfurt's in my focus on the possibility of sustained indeterminacy of agentic possibilities in such cases: what happens when no path of action stands out as more or less attractive or possible? How do our experiences of volitional *indeterminacy* shape the ways we act? By focusing on such contexts in addition to contexts of wholeheartedness and volitional necessity, philosophers of agency can flesh out richer accounts of agents' experiences, including in difficult periods where it seems remarkable that agents continue to act at all, and even more remarkable when they come to act more morally than they had before.

If I am right to think that a) one major characteristic of epistemological disorientations is a disruption of the processes of reflection that can lead to decisive agency, and b) epistemological disorientations can disrupt processes of reflection in ways that benefit ethical agency, then an explanation is needed for why processes of reflection which produce less decisiveness are sometimes better for action, particularly insofar as they create and require conditions for humility, flexibility, and relationality in deliberation and action.

5. Epistemological Disorientations And Agency

I now want to draw out a few of the implications of my conceptual claims for thinking about what experiences of disorientation do for us as knowers – they can change the way we experience our processes of learning, reflecting, decision-making, and acting. My major claim here is that epistemological disorientations can disrupt our practices of knowing in ways which make for more epistemic humility and more tentative, relational knowers. My claims about how more tentative, relational knowing is good for moral agency are fleshed out in the next chapter.

Epistemological disorientations disrupt *what and how we know* largely by shifting what we pay attention to and what we expect will be apparent to us. During or after periods of self-doubt, we might come to pay closer attention to parts of our experience that will tell us more about who we are or what we aim to do. As a result of some educational experiences, we often pay closer attention to our ignorance, or to how objects of knowledge change and become more or less apparent; correspondingly, we can come to expect that some things will be opaque or unavailable to us as knowers, and that objects of knowledge will require that we know dynamically over time. Having experienced epistemological disorientations, we may become more accustomed to revisiting and revising what we thought we knew; our habits of knowing change, altering both the content of what we know (i.e., we pay more attention to less obvious parts of the world, and to how they change) and the way we gain such knowledge (i.e., we are forced to gain such knowledge by depending on new and sometimes less mainstream sources). Given how epistemological disorientations very often cue us to what we don't know but need to know in order to act, they can create an urgency of dependence on the knowledge

of others. In order to make decisions about my life, I might require the insights of the people around me who are more aware of some of my habits, preferences, and faults than I am.

Epistemological disorientations can further disrupt *how we feel* about our knowledge and processes of knowing, largely by bringing the distinct feelings of investment and acceptance (parallel to those discussed at the end of chapter two) to the fore: as a result of such disorientations the extent to which we feel attached to particular knowledge can be disrupted. These effects are evident in experiences of deep self-doubt and education: if we identified very strongly in a specific way (e.g., in a particular religious or political direction), as a result of such identification being shaken, we may always identify more tentatively in the future. Epistemological disorientations can have a major impact on loosening the way we understand and invest in identifications, particularly when it was a major shift in such identification that disoriented us in the first place. Such disorientations can but do not always lead to overall more moderate or balanced social commitments; we can think of cases where, for example, crises of faith lead to harsher dogmatism in a new direction or total apathy. In many cases, though, epistemological disorientations introduce awareness of a need to negotiate the feelings of investment and acceptance in such a way that we understand our belief-based projects to be meaningful without identifying so strongly with them that a shift in beliefs can lead to permanent despair. Returning to Descartes, feelings of power are also importantly at issue as a result of epistemological disorientations: the more epistemological disorientations feel out of my control, the more powerless I can feel as a result of them.

If I had in the past felt so oriented and affirmed in my knowledge that I felt empowered (e.g., in control of making my own belief system cohere, or of teaching others how to do so), epistemological disorientations can often involve feelings of powerlessness.

Descartes was in a self-constructed situation of doubt, and wondered what was in his power to believe or control about his knowledge practices. Epistemological disorientations are all the more connected to felt powerlessness in contexts where feeling certain about my beliefs is a pre-requisite for gaining respect as a strong, reliable, or trustworthy agent, and expressions of doubt or confusion are taken to indicate weak or unstable agency (e.g., a professional woman must sound sure of herself for her clients and colleagues to trust her initiatives or advice). As epistemologically disoriented, I can not only feel powerless in terms of controlling or managing my own beliefs, preferences, desires, and decisions, but I can also be rendered powerless and untrustworthy by others who think decisiveness is the mark of intelligence, ability, and strength, or even that it is a basic requirement of a job or role in society.

Epistemological disorientations disrupt *how we act and identify* on the basis of knowledge particularly on the dimension of how decisively, arrogantly, quickly, or stubbornly we act. Disorientations bring to the fore questions of the role of epistemic self-control in processes of agency. Frankfurt claims that “A person who is deliberating about what to do is seeking an alternative to ‘doing what comes naturally.’ His aim is to replace the liberty of anarchic impulsive behaviour with the autonomy of being under his own control” (1987, 43). Such a perspective dichotomizes on the one hand controlled, sought, aimed at behaviour, and on the other, the default of anarchic, impulsive

behaviour. The idea is that any agent who knows what is good for her will deliberately dissociate herself from behaviour that feels dispersed or out of control – “the intent is at least partly to resolve conflict or to avoid it” (Frankfurt 1987, 43). One of my most important points here is that the felt experiences which can accompany this kind of agency (i.e., where I take myself to always have the ability to identify and control potentially conflicted, impulsive preferences) may more often involve arrogance and individualism than vulnerability and awareness of relationality.⁸⁹ As I argue in the next chapter, vulnerability and relationality are crucial parts of ethical agency that can be overlooked by models which privilege agents’ control and decisiveness.

Experiences of disorientation can compel epistemic humility by drawing our attention to the fallibility of knowers and the dynamism of what we need to know. Just as in and after processes of epistemological disorientation we may tend to pursue and envision knowledge in ways more tentative and open to revision, so too may the kind of actions and identities we take as a result of or on the basis of gained knowledge be more

⁸⁹ Epistemological disorientations can function to undercut moral dogmatism. There is an interesting practice in clinical psychology which seems to harness some of the motivational power of epistemological and affective disorientations (Rollnick et al 2007). ‘Motivational interviewing’ is a process which sometimes strategically creates affective tension in clients as a motivational tool, often in the context of addiction. For example, imagine a client who says to her therapist: “I absolutely need to quit smoking immediately.” On a particular motivational interviewing approach, her therapist might respond by saying something like: “Why? You don’t actually need to, do you? You could cut down a bit, perhaps, but you don’t smoke all that much, and you’re under a lot of stress right now. Why not do it some other time?” In clinical contexts, such a conversation can surface what is or should actually be a less clear cut position on behalf of the client: she should indeed quit smoking, but her current motivation may insufficiently account for how difficult it might be, how superficially her motivation might be tied to what someone else wants for her, rather than what she wants for herself, and so on. Motivational interviewing aims to shore up the actual insecurities in her process of motivation, or the underlying likelihood that her commitments will not be sustainable. Verbal pressing in the opposite direction to what is obviously the client’s good idea purposively aims to generate and sustain ambivalence in a client who seems overly committed to one solution. As I read them, such practices involve the relational generation of affective disorientation in the face of fierce cognitive orientedness, which borders on dogmatism. Acting from fierce orientedness in moral cases makes us particularly susceptible to acting arrogantly and imperialistically; disorientations can guard against such tendencies at times by making us less self-assured.

tentative and open to multiple stages of revision. Social epistemologists have shown the importance of situating knowers in their contexts and communities of knowledge practices, and shown how important it is for knowers to be non-isolated particularly when trying to develop alternative ways of knowing. So in contrast to the little support Gilman received from her social circumstance, we can see how some second-wave ‘click experiences’ were allowed to be productive because of how individuals could experience them together, and how Boler’s students might be supported in soundwave experiences of political education by environments of peers and teachers who both challenge and motivate them. Individuals who have been disoriented will more likely understand themselves to be one among many knowers, subject to limitations and open to change – we have known ourselves to be limited and seen the need to change epistemic commitments before. As Boler explains:

Once engaged in the discomfort of ambiguity, it is possible to explore the emotional dimensions and investments—angers and fears, and the histories in which these are rooted. We can explore how our identities are precariously constructed in relation to one another, so that to suggest change may feel like a threat to our survival...Learning to live with ambiguity, discomfort, and uncertainty is a worthy educational ideal. (Boler 1999, 198)

By simultaneously cutting at multiple levels of our experience of knowledge, epistemological disorientations also have the potential to show how these levels are interconnected in allowing us to claim to know or to be compelled to act on the basis of knowledge. As disoriented, I am more likely to develop awareness of how what I notice

and how easily I know are related to how settled I feel in my identity as a knower, and how readily I feel I am capable to act on the basis of my knowledge; such awareness is often generated, as in the case of Heidegger's hammer, by the breakdown of knowledge practices. For instance, when I am disoriented after being made aware of what I have failed to know about because of a failure to notice (e.g., the experience of a mixed race person who looks white to me; Alcoff 2006, Sullivan and Tuana 2007), I might be more likely to notice limitations in my processes of generating beliefs and knowledge (e.g., an underlying presumption that a person's race only affects their experience when it situates them as a 'visible minority'), I might be more inclined to think humbly of myself as a knower (e.g., to acknowledge how much my position as a 'reliable knower' depends on contingent social circumstances and educatedness; to recognize how my only possibility for more accurate knowledge requires that I depend more on the knowledge claims of others), and I might act more tentatively on the basis of other things I think I know (e.g., the gender of a stranger), because I have learned that I have harmed others on the basis of mistaken beliefs in the past. Epistemological disorientations often change the way we expect, reflect, and know by disrupting and slowing these multiple levels of experience.

Babbitt's account ties together a number of the examples and theories I am reading and challenging here. Babbitt draws on Dillon's account of Anne in order to endorse Frankfurt's view of how people can choose to live with conflicts and incongruities:

People choose to take seriously some sorts of incongruities in some sorts of ways.

We do not just accept any sort of ambivalence or conflict, and we do not recognize

any sort of ambivalence and conflict in others as expressing pursuit of integrity.

That people choose to live with conflicts and incongruities may be explained after all, as Frankfurt suggests, by an integrated self. The problem with Frankfurt's view is not the idea of 'integrated self' but rather the idea of a currently integrated self.

Anne gives importance to incongruities relative to a sort of integration that she pursues. (Babbitt 2001, 83)

The cases of disorientation I am describing run even deeper than the conflicts described here: as disoriented, we are not sure our experiences are resulting from incongruities in the first place, we do not often feel we have a choice to live with or not live with the incongruities, and we might lack the foresight to recognize how incongruities now could make for integration in the future. Without an accurate account of what epistemological disorientations are (and why Anne, Charlotte, and others might be understood to be in the middle of them), philosophers of agency will not be able to do justice to disoriented individuals' experience, to the extent to which their agency is distinct from that of 'integrated selves' while still being agency, and to the extent to which particular capacities for responsible agency might actually be improved by their disorientation. Any view which aligns some capacities to live with conflictedness with improved agency, as mine does, will be complicated: conflictedness can be productive, but there is also something troubling about someone who can live with too much conflict. A balance must be struck between so much discomfort that an individual loses sanity, and so much comfort that she becomes complacent. Part of what could compel theorists to read experiences of severe doubt or internal struggle as part of an agent's *intentional* agency is a worry that reading them as loss of cognitive control would conflict with acknowledging

the agency that seems to persist. My reading of epistemological disorientation is motivated by the sense that agency and loss of control are non-exclusive: persons can be agents as loci of meaningful experience, reflection, and action, even when their capacities for clear introspection and knowledge are compromised; that is, even (and sometimes especially) when epistemologically disoriented.

6. Conclusions

My account of epistemological disorientations means to characterize connected dimensions of experiences of disorientation more broadly. I have now provided a conceptual framework for theorizing experienced disorientations: corporeal disorientations are bodily experiences of unease which disrupt bodily habits in ways which complicate our senses of how to act and interact; affective disorientations are experiences of unsettlement on an emotional level, involving unclear, inharmonious, or non-habitual affective experiences which disrupt emotional processes and relational involvements; and epistemological disorientations are experiences of disruption in processes of knowledge formation, application, and revision which complicate our abilities as knowers and agents. My project in the next chapter is to establish a vision of moral agency which accounts for a) how particular complex and difficult experiences can cultivate our possibilities for better ethical identification and action, and b) how experiences of disorientation are some such experiences. As overlapping, interactive, and dynamic experiences, felt disorientations are experiences of unease and disruption that

make it difficult to go on with our lives as they were; I turn now to showing how this can be beneficial.

Chapter Five: Disorientation And Moral Agency

When Adorno tells us that only by becoming inhuman can we attain the possibility of becoming human, he underscores the disorientation at the heart of the moral deliberation, the fact that the 'I' who seeks to chart its course has not made the map it reads, does not have all the language it needs to read the map, and sometimes cannot find the map itself.

(Judith Butler 2005, 110)

A certain amount of pain, the knowledge about vulnerability and pain, is actually useful. It forces one to think about the actual material conditions of being interconnected and thus being in the world. It frees one from the stupidity of perfect health, and the full-blown sense of existential entitlement that comes with it. Paradoxically, it is those who have already cracked up a bit, those who have suffered pain and injury, who are better placed to take the lead in the process of ethical transformation.

(Rosi Braidotti 2006, 249)

We have seen that disorientations are rich and not easily characterized. They are multifaceted, dense, and surprising. Corporeal disorientations can radically disrupt our habits of movement at the same time as allowing for transformation of interpersonal interactions. Affective disorientations can introduce inharmonious affect at the same time as swells of vibrant feeling. Epistemological disorientations can prompt deep confusion at the same time as they make it possible for us to learn things we didn't see coming. In the context of lives, none of these dimensions happens alone; disorientations always involve aspects of all three dimensions. Chapters two to four make up the first half of the curve of this project: disorientations are particular kinds of experiences, and

they produce particular effects. In this chapter I turn into the second: multidimensional disorientations and their effects connect to the moral landscape in ways which can benefit agents and improve our capacities to act morally.

Connections between disorientations and moral agency are multiple and intertwined. I begin to pull them apart as follows: in section one I draw on feminist ethicists to sketch particular aspects of the moral landscape. In section two I argue for specific ways in which disorientations' effects, introduced through chapters two to four, can benefit moral agency, beyond simply changing the way we think. In section three, I explain why acting morally can sometimes feel disorienting. I am not claiming that disorientations are always good for us. I am suggesting neither that all morally relevant developments of agency can be brought about by disorientations, nor that I will be able to represent all the morally relevant developments of agency that can be. Although as individuals and as moral theorists, we tend to be better versed in the ways disorientations can harm than the ways they can help, contra most of the philosophical tradition, the goods of orientedness can be trumped. Although orientedness is in many cases good for agency, as Frankfurt and others have shown, it isn't always, and the assumption that it *is* is pernicious.

1. The Moral Landscape

I take for granted that in many cases, our responsibilities are clear and meetable. Many aspects of the moral landscape are fairly clear to us: it is my responsibility to take care of

children under my supervision, to treat colleagues with respect, to be fair in interactions with my family, to not steal someone else's wallet, and in general to act responsibly with respect to the needs and flourishing of myself and others. A significant part of our moral efforts aim to meet clear responsibilities. The vision of the moral landscape I outline is not meant to provide a full picture of all its aspects. I am interested here in a set of responsibilities which might be seen as more subtle, complex, uncertain, complicated, or difficult to respond to, which often arise in complex contexts of difficulty, injustice, and oppression. We may not always recognize that such responsibilities exist. They are responsibilities for which there is not likely to be a single, delimited rule. Coming to act better with respect to these responsibilities is my concerted focus in terms of improved moral agency here—more attentiveness to the complex responsibilities of living in community with structures of power and privilege. As I will explain, such responsibilities can be complex insofar as they require action across levels of agency, they are often not connected to wrongs that I personally have committed, their aims may not be entirely clear to agents, and they may not ever be fully met. Although this is a particular set of responsibilities, given that we still regularly live in contexts where individuals face significant difficulties and pervasive injustice, such responsibilities are not rare. I will suggest that disorientations can be morally beneficial for agents in these contexts, and that acting responsibly in such moral contexts may also be disorienting.

The work of particular feminist ethicists substantially informs my vision of these aspects of the moral landscape. While feminists have different relations and allegiances toward specific moral traditions, their approaches have much in common. I am

particularly interested in the seriousness with which they take moral psychology, their interest in relationality, their attention to concepts of responsibility, and their recognition of the systematically unjust contexts in which we act. I develop my arguments for the benefits of disorientation and the disorienting character of some responsible action from these feminist accounts, and I believe that similar arguments could be developed within various alternative ethical ‘operating systems’. My arguments for the ways in which disorientations can spur positive developments in moral agency will not work for every ethical framework, however. They are not likely to be compatible with theories that view individuals as self-sufficient, understand the individual to be the sole locus of agency, hold that moral motivation can be chiefly explained apart from experience, or that underestimate how deeply relations of power and privilege shape the kinds of agents we become. Having said this, my arguments may resonate with ethical frameworks which approach relationality, the position of experience in motivation, and structures of power differently than I do.⁹⁰

I take it that moral agents are those persons called to act well in relationships with environments, other living beings, things, ideas and projects. The kinds of actions that fall within the realm of moral agency are therefore primarily habits and practices of interaction among persons and the world. ‘Acting well’ morally involves action that

⁹⁰ Moral theorists need not accept all of my claims about the moral landscape in order to find my arguments about the benefits of disorientation compelling. Ethicists could make sense of the promise of disorientations from different understandings of the moral landscape, or while only endorsing some of the claims I draw from feminist ethics and moral psychology. For example, though I claim that virtue development should not be the primary focus in establishing the promise of disorientations, virtue theorists might read disorientations’ capacity to prompt sensitivity to the needs of others as partly a development of the virtue of kindness, or utilitarians might view disorientations’ capacity to bring urgent needs to our attention as morally promising for its potential to help us cultivate clearer understanding of which actions will benefit the most individuals.

improves the ways in which one's self and others are treated and responded to in these interactions, that makes it likely that their lives will be improved overall by them, that aims to respond to the needs of all participants given the resources available, and that works with a challengeable view of justice and injustice (Walker 2007, 10). I am assuming here that there are certain kinds of needs that all living beings share—for example, resources for physical health and safe locations for living and interacting with others. Rather than working from a specific view of flourishing or justice, I rely on a commitment to the thesis that humans have objective interests (Babbitt 1996, 77-80), that those who have their needs met are better able to thrive than those who do not, and that experiences of joy, pleasure, health, and relationship are much of what makes life meaningful. Any reference to 'objective interests' will be controversial, particularly from a political perspective (e.g., feminism) that challenges standard liberal notions of objective interests as what a person would choose if she were "fully rational and adequately informed" (Babbitt 1993, 247). I am interested in a more critically engaged vision of objective interests, such as the one Babbitt favours, which takes into account the ways oppressive conditions can cloud individuals' senses of what it is possible for them to desire for themselves, or of their interests in living meaningful lives as agents (Babbitt 1993, 246-247). These characterizations of moral agency and the objective interests of agents are not shared by all ethicists, but I take my more detailed points about the moral landscape to be the more interesting and controversial points of traction, so I will spend more time there. Roughing out a philosophical view of the moral landscape requires considering what counts as moral action, the character of the call to moral action, the specifics of calls to moral action, and the character of moral agents.

Feminist philosophers writing about ethics, agency, and autonomy have offered views of human agents as relational and dynamic rather than individualistic and static. To say that agents are relational is to say that we fundamentally exist in and are conditioned by our interdependence with other agents, and that we must understand agency within such conditions (Code 1991; Lloyd 2000; Meyers 1997; Koggel 1998; Sherwin 1998; Campbell 2003). Susan Sherwin explains, “The term *relational* [emphasizes] the political dimensions of the multiple relationships that structure an individual’s selfhood” (1998, 19). In contrast with some views of agency, relational theorists (e.g., Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000) have established a nuanced view of how agentic capacities are all relational: no proper acts of agency, judgment, memory, and so on, can happen without relational development. As Marilyn Friedman explains, using autonomy as her focus, “According to the relational approach, persons are fundamentally social beings who develop the competency for autonomy through social interaction with other persons. These developments take place in a context of values, meanings, and modes of self-reflection that cannot exist except as constituted by social practices” (Friedman 2000, 40). To return to the point I made in chapter three, relationality is a fact rather than a necessary good of our lives—though a necessary component of any good theory of agency. To say that agents are dynamic is to say that we are not fixed in ways of feeling, thinking, willing, and acting—we experience changes of mind, heart, desire, and capacity—and we must understand agency in light of, rather than in denial of, such a

fact (Moody-Adams 1990; Young 2006).⁹¹ Agency, including moral agency, is constituted partly through the actions of relational and dynamic selves.

Moral action involves such everyday practices as thinking, communicating, forming relationships and planning, as well as judging moral situations, holding ourselves and others responsible, and working for political change. The ‘moral landscape’ thus involves all of these practices and others—broadly speaking, the whole of the social world.⁹² The first kinds of everyday practices, and particularly those of interaction, communication, and relationship-building have been overlooked by some traditional accounts of moral agency. Margaret Urban Walker’s characterization of morality resonates with my project:

Morality consists in a family of practices that show what is valued by making people accountable to each other for it. Practices of making morally evaluative judgments are prominent among moral practices, but they do not exhaust them. There are also habits and practices of paying attention, imputing states of affairs to people’s agency, interpreting and redescribing human actions, visiting blame, offering excuses, inflicting punishment, making amends, refining and inhibiting the experience or expression of feelings, and responding in thought, act, and feelings to any of the foregoing. (2007, 10)

⁹¹ Michele Moody-Adams characterizes the importance of consistency for character, but also introduces an account of agency as dynamic, establishing how important it is that agents be able to act out of character: it is because agents have capacities to act out of character that we can be justified in holding them responsible for their actions (Moody-Adams 1990, 118).

⁹² I follow Walker (2007, 105) in her uses of metaphors of geography and mapping for describing the context of moral action.

I am, like Walker, thinking of everyday agency as being full of moral import, rather than understanding moral agency to be a special sphere of agency.⁹³ I read moral action as synonymous with responsible action: acting well in light of the kinds of agents we are, given the kinds of moral situations we are in, given the kinds of actions we are called to and given who we are accountable to. I also endorse Gail Weiss' assertion of the need for a more distinctly corporeal account of moral agency than some feminist accounts provide (1999, 141-142). I take moral agency to be largely about everyday practices of interaction: with spaces, things, events, living beings, projects, ideas, and norms. As Walker and Weiss partly indicate, we interact through overlapping embodiments of thought, attention, communication, intention, and care. Some interactions carry more moral weight than others, in keeping with the power they have to shape environments, individuals (including ourselves), communities, and future interactions.

The relational and dynamic character of agents is also connected to our limitedness: we work not only with finite physical capacities, energy, time, mobility, and material resources, but also within the conditions and possibilities we receive from our communities. Our actions are conditioned by our embodiments, experiences, and relationships. As Genevieve Lloyd explains, echoing the epigraph from Judith Butler,

A self is born into a future in which it will make individual decisions, for which it will be held responsible, praised or blamed. But it is also born into the past of its communal life—a past that both precedes it and awaits it; a past of collective

⁹³ Walker advances an 'expressive-collaborative model of ethics' which "pictures morality as a socially embodied medium of mutual understanding and adjustment between persons in certain terms, particularly those that define those persons' identities, relationships, and values" (Walker 2003, 94).

memory and imagination—which must be reckoned with in the present. The endless multiplication of possibilities for what a self can be and do is kept under restraint by the limitations of, and on, the here-and-now self that interacts spatially with the world. (Lloyd 2000, 122)

As Iris Marion Young similarly draws our attention to the relevance of a collective and/or communal past for agency:

Most of the conditions under which people act are socio-historical: they are the products of previous actions, usually products of many coordinated and uncoordinated but mutually influencing actions. Those collective actions have left determinate effects on the physical and cultural environment, effects that condition future action in specific ways...Persons stand in systematically different and unequal social positions due to the way institutions operate together. Rather than being a static condition, these factors that constrain and enable individual possibilities are ongoing processes in which many actors participate. (Young 2006, 113-114)

As Young makes clear, calls to moral action always take place within social situations and interactions which are still fundamentally unequal, structured by systematic frameworks of oppression and domination, and conditioned by limited resources of time, energy, and sustaining materials (e.g., money, natural resources). Frameworks of marginalization are built, maintained, and enforced in complicated ways, at local and global levels which play out, for example, not only in terms of which populations are at higher risk of illness and early death, but also in terms of which kinds

of bodies are likely to be safer in their communities and more at ease in their environments. Du Bois and Fanon exemplified the bodily unease that came from being unsafe as racialized bodies within a social situation structured by racism (Du Bois 1996, 16; Fanon 1967, 110-111). Ascribing responsibility for these frameworks and attempting to change them (e.g., trying to establish responsibility for ways in which poorer beings, things, and environments bear more than their share of difficulty and risk to sustain the lifestyles of richer people) is complex: the call to moral action must take into account the fact that there can be responsibilities to change the situation without any one person or group of people being clearly or exclusively responsible. The injustice of the situation persists whether or not there is an obvious wrongdoer, and we can have more trouble noticing injustice the less it threatens our well-being. Calls to moral action are therefore not always clear. They are often obscured by privilege or oppression, and cannot be purely calls to the 'guilty' – not only because the guilty might be less motivated to change their action the more they benefit from such actions, but more importantly because it is often extremely complicated to tease out who is responsible for injustice. We can bear partial responsibility even when we are the subjects of injustice.

Partly in light of the complexity of assigning responsibility, several feminist political theorists have adopted or maintained explicitly forward-looking models of social responsibility in recent work (Card 1996; Lloyd 2000; Walker 2003; 2007; and Young 1990; 2006). Their views are nuanced and differently applied in each case, but I take particular shifts in emphasis away from strict culpability or blame, toward understandings of responsibility which afford future possibilities for resistance and change to be common

to them. Sherwin (2008; Forthcoming) offers a vision of moral action that connects understandings of agents' relationality, dynamism, and limitedness to an understanding of calls to responsible action as urgent, multiple and often conflicting, in the complex contexts of large-scale problems. As Sherwin explains:

The list of threats is long and diverse, including environmental degradation (climate change, loss of habitat for many species, limited clean water supplies, and pollution of air, water, and soil); the on-going build-up and wide dispersion of nuclear, chemical, biological, and conventional weapons; the ever-growing gap between rich and poor; unrelenting (and in some cases, worsening) ethnic and religious hatreds; and the development of new infectious diseases (HIV, SARS, H1N1) along the return of old ones in new, more robust forms (TB). (Sherwin forthcoming, 13)

These threats not only deeply inform the lives of much of the world's population, but are also structured such that considering responsibility for them is complex:

Because the actions of individuals and those of the organizations they belong to are deeply intertwined, the moral responsibilities of actors at each level must be determined in relation to the opportunities made available at the other levels. We need to look not only at the choices of various agents, but also at the background conditions that structure those choices. The situation involves a distressingly complex array of coordination problems...Each type of actor must work collaboratively with others at the same and different levels of human organization if it is to develop sufficient scope to act effectively for positive change. (Sherwin forthcoming, 17, 30, original emphasis)

In the same vein, Young claims that conceptions of ‘holding and being held responsible’ allow for understandings of responsibility not based on problematic economical models of liability or blame. She argues that moral theory must “distinguish between blaming and holding responsible the perpetrators...Blame is a backward-looking concept. Calling on agents to take responsibility for their actions, habits, feelings, attitudes, images, and associations, on the other hand, is forward-looking” (Young 1990, 124, 151). For Young, responsibility for harms of structural injustice cannot be ascribed exclusively on a model of blame or liability. Singling agents out as blameworthy can insufficiently account for the social climate that makes such actions possible, desirable, and acceptable for many. According to Young’s social connection model, responsibility must be understood as, in part, action in the face of complex injustices, involving multiple agents and a call to act well in ways which extend beyond repairing past wrongs. According to her, such a model:

does not isolate perpetrators; it judges background conditions of action; it is more forward-looking than backward-looking; its responsibility is essentially shared; and it can be discharged only through collective action...Our responsibility derives from belonging together with others in a system of interdependent processes of cooperation and competition through which we seek benefits and aim to realize projects. (Young 2006a, 103, 119)

Finally, Claudia Card notes how far back critiques of liability models go, drawing on Herbert Fingarette’s *On Responsibility* (1967), and highlighting her own interest in forward-looking responsibility: “The orientation I have in mind is, like Fingarette’s,

basically forward-looking...Most essays on responsibility in contemporary Anglo-American moral philosophy look backward. They are preoccupied with punishment and reward, praise or blame, excuses, mitigation, and so on” (Card 1996, 25). My main task is not to clarify forward-looking and/or social connection models in contrast to other approaches, rather, the point here is that the moral situation is crucially structured by injustice: whatever moral agents do, we do it on this kind of uneven plane.⁹⁴

When I act responsibly in forward-looking ways, I pursue a course of responsible action in which the aim, duration, sufficiency, and impact of my responsibility can remain unsettlingly unclear. To understand the nature of moral calls to action, we can return to early conceptions of responsibility from Young (1990) and Walker (2007). In the introduction to *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Young endorses a discourse ethics in which calls to moral action come (at least mainly) from particular individuals and groups to other individuals and groups, as articulations of the concrete needs they have. As she explains,

While everyday discourse about justice certainly makes claims, these are not theorems to be demonstrated in a self-enclosed system. They are instead calls, pleas, claims *upon* some people by others...The call to ‘be just’ is always situated in concrete social and political practices that precede and exceed the philosopher.

(Young 1990, 5, original emphasis)

⁹⁴ Recent social connection models of responsibility often have concrete considerations of experienced identity at their roots; Young in particular provides an excellent example of this, given her longstanding and variously pursued interest in phenomenology and embodiment (Young 2005).

Later in the book, when Young considers how particular groups have faced systematic social disadvantage, many calls to action are seen as coming from the disadvantaged groups, as articulations of need.

Though in many respects the law is now blind to group differences, some groups continue to be marked as deviant, as the Other...Continued racist, sexist, homophobic, ageist, and ableist institutions and behaviour create particular circumstances for these groups, usually disadvantaging them in their opportunity to develop their capacities. (Young 1990, 164)

The call to action in these cases is fairly determinate in origin and content: groups marked as Other call for more privileged groups to create circumstances that foster rather than limit the development of their capacities.

In *Moral Understandings*, Walker establishes less determinate dimensions of calls to action. She argues for a picture of the moral landscape which does justice to “how much and how inevitably most lives are entangled with and given to others, as well as to chancy circumstances beyond our control” (Walker 2007, 112-113). Walker agrees with Young that specific moral claims can arise from our relationships with particular others (2007, 113), but this is not all moral agents need to navigate:

I don't think we simply haven't *yet* found an all-purpose solution for all of life, or for all lives, to the question of how far to go with which morally significant commitments, where to stop, or when to compromise or change course...I think the resistance of our lives to this treatment is due, in part, to the nature of things in our lives that morally matter. It is also due to the nature of these lives themselves...We

are neither unfortunate enough to have to go it all alone in trying to find and keep an acceptable and vital moral order in our lives nor lucky enough to have the last word on whether we have succeeded. (Walker 2007, 112, original emphasis)

According to Walker, calls to action involve complex combinations of my obligations, others' needs, and the power structures of the situations; they do not always come unmediated from particular others (especially since the calls others make are not automatically just), and they often require moral sensitivity and perceptiveness in order for those who are called to act to understand what they are called to do. As she explains:

So the narrative of 'who I am' (or 'who we are') and the narrative of 'how have we gotten here together' is threaded through by another story, one about 'what this means.' The last involves a history of moral concepts acquired, refined, revised, displaced, and replaced, both by individuals and within some communities of shared moral understanding...Moral guidelines are not mechanical because things of importance are multiple, often multiply relative (in terms of importance to whom, for what, when, given what else), and (so) not obvious. (Walker 2007, 119-120)

Young stresses the ways in which adequately holding ourselves responsible in and for contexts of oppression requires that we heed what others tell us and negotiate our own positions and commitments. Walker brings our attention to the need to read what seems to be unjust in each situation, imaginatively seek new courses of action, and be prepared to hold ourselves responsible for as yet unknown oppressions in the future. All agents have responsibilities to act against injustice in such contexts, and we ought to meet them,

even if we do not always recognize them or feel that we do, and even though we may be called to meet them differently depending on our different contexts. Like both Young and Walker, I am working from an understanding of our moral lives where, even given very complex moral circumstances, we do act. Calls to moral action are not always determinate, and rarely completely indeterminate. On feminist and social connectionist accounts which emphasize this kind of responsibility in concrete contexts of mass health, ecological, and social crises for example, what will be within my control to responsibly do, who I will need to responsibly act with or for, and what would count as my having been sufficiently responsible can be open questions, and the open-endedness of these accounts is part of their strength.

Given that we are working with and within unjust understandings and social structures, in the midst of uncovering new areas of injustice and neglect, what we currently think is a positive way of acting morally may be at once the best thing we can do right now and radically insufficient (see Card 2002, for example, on the complexity of moral action after evil). We can be called to urgent action when unprepared (e.g., calls to address climate change immediately) or to slow action in order to let others lead (e.g., in some Truth and Reconciliation Commissions). The partial indeterminacy of some calls to action reflects some degree of tenuousness in the contexts within which we act. I find Elizabeth Spelman's (2002) characterization particularly helpful for establishing the fragility of agents and the moral landscape:

Humans don't just live in a world of breakables; we *are* breakables, our bodies and souls by their very nature subjects to fracture and fissure. And we are social

animals, our dependency upon each other given shape by the connections we find and forge among ourselves. These relationships are by their very nature subject to damage, dissolution, collapse—sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse...We humans have responded to the fact of being creatures who are inherently limited by the resources at our disposal, who are subject to the ever present possibility of failure and decay, who sometimes seek continuity with the past, and who face the necessity of deciding whether or not to patch up relationships with our neighbours...facts of the human condition that perhaps we tend to find disturbing. (Spelman 2002, 49-50, 138-139)

In the context of the fragility Spelman articulates, and in the absence of any single moral framework that can fully address the multi-tiered character of all moral problems, calls to action and consequences of moral actions are sometimes unclear.⁹⁵ Although many calls to action are relatively well defined, partly indeterminate calls to action are a persistent part of our moral lives. Social connectionist accounts of responsibility have built in some awareness of the fragility of some parts of the moral landscape.

2. The Effects Of Disorientation: *How Disorientations Can Help Us Be More*

Responsible

⁹⁵ Butler's (2005) account of moral agency is one of the best at approximating the indeterminacy of the moral landscape, approaching the question not by saying exactly that *calls to action* are indeterminate, so much as that agents, the accounts they give of themselves, the others they give them to, and the social world we all together make are radically indeterminate and changing. Butler holds that our ways of giving accounts of ourselves are part of the way we act responsibly and respond to calls to moral action – and the accounts we give shift the moral landscape at the same time as they shape the accounts others can give of themselves (2005, 132). As she explains, “The very meaning of responsibility must be rethought...it cannot be tied to the conceit of a self fully-transparent to itself. Indeed, to take responsibility for oneself is to avow the limits of any self-understanding, and to establish these limits not only as a condition for the subject but as the predicament of the human community” (Butler 2005, 83).

On some standard views, the moral ideal is that agents have the right views and act in the right ways, for the right reasons, and do so fully, which is to say in ways which demonstrate the alignment of their desires, preferences, and motivations (Frankfurt 1987; 1988; 1999; Strawson 2008; Velleman 2002). Moral action is therefore often positioned as right action, for the right reasons, enacted with an appropriate degree of conviction. I am interested in how we should understand moral processes to persist even when capacities for judgment, reason, identification, and reaction are challenged or compromised, as they are in periods of disorientation. Experiences of disorientation can complicate the vision of surefootedness many standard views favour, mainly by complicating how readily we can get the ‘right reasons’ and how fully we can feel we have them. I have argued that, given the complexities of joint responsibility and the conditions of injustice, even the supposition that agents can always identify the right views and/or actions is called into question. It is not that we have no sense of what to do—typically, we do have a sense of the action called for. Rather, the experience of agents, particularly in very complex moral situations, does not always align with ideal theories of moral agency. I am interested in how experiences of disorientation can benefit agents’ moral motivation, understanding, and capacities for moral action, especially but not exclusively in various contexts of pervasive injustice.

A) Disorientation’s Promise Given The Nature Of Moral Agents

Moral psychology has arisen in part from philosophical interest in how psychological experiences and events are involved in our capacities to act morally. Theorists have written widely in moral psychology, particularly in the last 25 years, and I draw on only some branches of the literature. It is now a richly established field, with theorists who often write at the overlaps between ethics, philosophical psychology, social/political theory, personal identity theory, and feminist philosophies, as well as from philosophies of the body and psychiatry (see e.g., Flanagan and Rorty ed. 1990; Thomas 1989; Baier 1985). Given how central emotions, dispositions, motives, perceptions, and memories are to processes of moral agency, moral psychologists find the neglect of them in ‘standard’ moral theory to be a major gap in our understanding of agents. Walker characterizes the project of much of moral psychology as follows:

Understanding individual psychologies and the social forces that shape them are important tasks for ethics. It is one thing to determine what, ethically and politically, people ought to do, yet another to grasp the conditions under which they are likely to recognize what they should do, summon the motivation to do it, overcome inhibitions and obstacles to doing it, and in the end do something like what is required...Moral psychology addresses the role of cognitions, judgment, perception, and emotion in relation to our moral capacities. (Walker 2004, ix-x).

Though there is a long history of discussing, for example, how experiences of pleasure should relate to motivation and action, recent moral psychology has generally filled in the conceptual links between experience and moral motivation, still eclipsed by many standard moral theories. I am especially interested in some very recent developments in moral psychology with a particular eye to embodiment, harm, and social situatedness,

where a number of projects in feminist ethics also overlap with moral psychology (see e.g., DesAutels and Walker ed. 2004; Walker 2003, 2007; Atkins and Mackenzie 2008; Campbell, Meynell, and Sherwin 2009; Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000). Many of the theorists who have come up in earlier chapters—DesAutels (2004) on moral oblivion, Dillon (1992, 1997) on self-respect, Benson (2000) on self-doubt, Calhoun (2008) on demoralization, Frankfurt (1987) on wholeheartedness—provide examples of work done at least partly in moral psychology.

Almost all the examples of agents I draw on in chapters two to four give insight into the importance of experience for agency—they were chosen in part for the way they make vivid descriptions of experience, and its character as embodied, affective, and cognitive, central. Our experiences form and change our identities, commitments, capacities, and patterns of attention, all of which contribute crucially to what kinds of actors we are in response to calls to moral agency. Part of why disorientations can be morally promising is because of the way they allow us to have, explore, reflect on, and identify on the basis of multidimensional (rather than purely cognitive, as though there were such a thing) experiences. But the moral promise of disorientations is not only because of the reflections they prompt: as I claimed in chapter two, disorientations can prompt better attention to bodies. Disorientations work against habits and understandings structured by dualism, prompting us to experience and identify in ways more attentive to the importance of bodies, affects, and non-propositional knowledge.

As agents, we are motivated by not only experience in general, but certain kinds of experience in particular: relational experience, experiences that pique our interest and hold our attention, and negative experiences that demand a response. I have drawn on examples from Servan-Schreiber, Didion, Gilman, and others to clarify the complex ways in which disorientations can involve and introduce particular experiences of relationality: bringing it to our attention as something we deeply depend on, or making us more aware of the ways it can harm and restrict us. Our ways of engaging in relational contexts and situations are shot through with moral significance—we can enact and respond to our relationality in better and worse ways, ways more likely to improve people’s lives, and ways more likely to harm them. Moral motivation is further complicated by situations where I am called to respond to other people who have harmed me: it is not clear that it is morally better that I care about improving their lives, another reason why we need an understanding of calls to action as only partly determined by what particular others call us to do.

We are inevitably relational beings, and disorientations can lead us to experience relationality in new or more expansive ways, where expansiveness means the capacity to be surprised at what we can do, and at the power we have to change our ways or the world. When disorientations help motivate more careful or appropriate relational action, they can be morally productive. I have drawn on Heyes’ example of the intrigue of bodily experience (e.g., yoga can leave me surprised at what my body can do), Freshly Charles’ descriptions of felt indeterminacy, and Pratt’s characterization of affective swell to show how experiences of disorientation can be intriguing and exciting at the same time

as they are unsettling. Given my claim that being motivated to sit with difficult experiences can allow for improved moral agency, and my claim that the intrigue of disorientations can motivate us to sit with difficult experiences, it follows that I think that disorientations can allow for improved moral agency.

Disorientations can be morally productive in part by countering another fact about the motivational structures of individuals: we can be motivated to think, identify, and act in the most stable, least risky ways available, even when something about our social/political contexts is calling us to forego stability in favour of risky action. We saw preferences to maintain stable understandings and identities play out in chapter four's example of students' resistance to radical or challenging views in educational contexts, and this is just one area in which we can be compelled to avoid risk out of self-protection. As we saw in cases of affective disorientation in chapter three and severe doubt in chapter four, disorientations can compel us to loosen rigid holds on our views, expectations, and identifications, at the same time as they show us that we can function in periods of affective insecurity. Pratt notes how her own social identifications became increasingly fluid as she experienced disorientations. I am not in favour of disruption for disruption's sake. Identity disruption is not so much good in itself as: a) a reality – our identities very often become seriously disrupted, and b) a good in cases where rigidly holding to my way of thinking or identifying means maintaining harmful assumptions, ignorance, and normative commitments.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ These cases, where being moral would involve risking the stability of my understandings and identifications, are common because of the way the moral landscape is still structured by oppression, and the ways so many of us continue to benefit from the suffering of others (Frye 1983, Young 1990).

Beyond the motivational importance of disorientations drawing attention to multi-dimensional layers of our own experience, disorientations can also draw attention to the multi-dimensional aspects of others' experiences in ways which improve how we act towards them as embodied, affective beings. Disorientations can help make us more sensitive to the needs of others, making their complex needs more alive to us in morally relevant ways – disorientations can help us recognize and respond to the susceptibility of bodies and the vulnerability of selves. Disorientations can help make me more aware of how complex embodied and affective experiences can be by directing attention, slowing action, and disrupting automatic behaviour (e.g., Didion, who came to realize that affects were more complex than she had known). We might think back to Des Autels, who claimed that we can be morally oblivious as the result of habitual actions, or as the result of intense focus on non-moral aspects of life (e.g., time constraints). According to her, “One way to avoid moral oblivion is to resist habituated, mindless patterns of thought and behaviour—to live more flexibly and ‘mindfully’ both as individuals and groups of individuals” (Des Autels 2004, 75). Disorientations can help counteract moral oblivion by making us more sensitive to richness and variation in experience—whether the experience belongs to me or others, and whether it is specifically experience of disorientation or not. Even without cueing us to particular ethical imperatives, disorientations can improve agents' capacities to sense, and therefore anticipate and/or respond to, others' experiences and needs. And as I will suggest in chapter seven, our own experiences of disorientation might help us develop better awareness of cases in

which disorientation is likely to be productive and the cases which it is not, giving us insight into how to assist in allowing disorientations to motivate rather than paralyze.

B) Disorientation's Promise Given The Kinds Of Moral Action Called For

I have claimed that agents are called to moral action in contexts where what kinds of action would be best or sufficient can be dynamic and sometimes unclear to us. Given this, acting in ways suited to the moral context can require acting without the confirmation of moral rightness, in the face of indeterminacy, and in ways open to correction and change. Situations where partly privileged individuals take up activism towards greater social justice provide good examples of what these features of moral action can feel like: Pratt writes about the feeling of push and pull, the perpetual openness to criticism and, the ongoing struggle to cultivate more gentleness and sensitivity while still acting boldly towards what seems like justice. We can be called to act quickly or slowly, radically or subtly, and we can be called *not* to act even as we may want to. I want to collect these aspects of the moral landscape together into a *fragility condition* of the moral landscape, returning to Spelman's claim that 'humans are breakables': the circumstances within which we act are fragile, and moral adequacy requires responding adequately to this fragility in the ways we act.

In chapters two, three, and four I suggested that disorientations can have *tenderizing effects*: they can check arrogance, foster humility, and generally make agents less hasty, more tentative. If we read 'tentativeness' as a balance between extremes of

over-zealousness or self-certainty and weakness of will or paralysis, I want to suggest that the tentativeness disorientations can create in agents can be morally productive insofar as it improves capacities to respond to the fragility condition of the contexts within which we act. In chapter four I claimed that disorientations can produce humility at the same time as they empower us: Gilman tells us that her experience of disorienting self-doubt prompted her to get off her ‘high horse of stark decisiveness’ at the same time as it propelled her towards creating a life that would better allow her to flourish. Disorientations can produce more tentative actors, and the fragility condition of contexts of action can mean that more tentative action is exactly what is called for.

It might be objected that the kinds of ‘reality checks’ we get from becoming more aware of the fragility of the situation are not in every case productive: particular agents might be better at following moral rules than engaging with aspects of uncertainty in the moral landscape (which often necessitates moral reconsideration). The picture of moral agency I am putting forward allows that certain kinds of moral behaviour and training might be best facilitated by rule-following. Harming others is typically bad. Helping others is typically good. It tends to be best not to kill, steal, or covet. But moral agents are also called to challenge moral understandings, engage in flexible dialogue with diverse moral views, and work out the significant and complicated details of how to align moral beliefs with the multiple and conflicting demands of moral life. Disorientations’ tenderizing effects—checking arrogance and fostering tentativeness—can be morally productive in helping us act in ways which better respond to the fragility condition of moral contexts. Recall Eli Clare from chapter two, who struggled to find support for his

bodily experience of being queer and trans, even from queer communities: disorientation's tenderizing effects helped Clare challenge moral understandings with a spirit of humility which accepts help from unexpected sources, including his community of origin. The surprising ways Clare's community gives him a way to identify coincide with his being able to challenge cycles of abuse and violence within his home. In the next chapter, I consider the way individuals were called to act in response to Matthew Shepard's death as the result of an anti-gay hate crime in Laramie, Wyoming, committed by two young men who had been raised in the community. There, the moral demands on individuals are fraught and the future of the community relies to some extent on individuals' capacities to engage with each other flexibly, sensitively, and with an openness to change. Recognizing and having to act within fragile conditions can also be very disorienting—this is part of why our experiences of becoming and being responsible agents can include feelings of disorientation (see section three). Disorientations' tenderizing effects are important in allowing individuals in the community to go on in fragile circumstances. Even if it is clear enough that I should act in a particular way, the ways in which my action can be made more tender and careful by the sense of humility and fallibility I get from having felt disoriented is likely to make my action more sensitive to the fragility of conditions and consequences of action, and to that extent, better.

Another implication of my characterization of the moral landscape as uneven terrain which systematically helps and harms some people, beings, and environments more than others—injustices of which many different kinds of agents have become

progressively more aware—is that calls to moral action often demand urgent work towards justice and against injustice. I argued in the first three chapters that disorientations can change the needs we and others have, make them more urgent, and make us more able to recognize them as urgent. We might think of how disorientations shifted and made more urgent Pratt’s and Gilman’s needs for alternative forms of social support, or of how Du Bois’ and Fanon’s disorientations in response to oppression made them more aware of the urgency of anti-racist action. Disorientations can be morally productive insofar as they can equip us to notice and act in response to urgent calls to action, including times when needs themselves have changed as a result of experienced disorientation—Brison’s needs change after her assault, and her disorientation equips her to notice and act in response to urgent needs for better support for women who have experienced sexual violence.

C) Disorientation’s Promise Given The Character Of Calls To Action

Calls to moral action are received differently depending of the position and expectations of the agents who receive them. That is, calls to moral action are often most accessible *from* the positions of particular agents, including their positions in frameworks of power and privilege, and therefore may not occur in the same way to agents in radically different social positions. As described earlier with Young and Walker, some calls to action are clearer than others, and there are many cases in which third party moral judgments are appropriate. For example, I need not know a person’s moral framework before stopping her from harming a child. Cases of disorientation are only one part of

moral agency – calls to action do not always disorient us. But the call to act morally in the face of the structural injustice of sweatshop labour will translate differently depending on the particularities of given agents: if I am working in a sweatshop, the call to action might be to protect my child for as long as possible from the need to work there; if I am a new leader in the government who formerly agreed to allow the US company to set up the sweatshop in my country, the call to action might be to make efforts to understand and change the working conditions, or to work to re-establish less exploitative, viable options for making a living wage in the country; if I am a Canadian consumer looking to buy inexpensive clothing, the call to action might be to deliberate carefully about my shopping habits (e.g., perhaps opting for used clothing stores), to lobby for institutions to refuse to sell sweatshop goods, or to make and sell clothing from more local materials. Calls to moral action are in every case mediated by agents' positions in structures of power and privilege, and can be hard to respond to for those at various levels of privilege: they can be both harder to see and harder to respond to, the more we stand to lose privilege, livelihood, or our lives by heeding the calls.

I drew on Babbitt in chapter four in order to claim that disorientations can produce shifts in attention and expectation: the disorientations of doubt and education can make us more likely to notice and/or anticipate that we will have unfamiliar or uneasy aspects of experience. Shifts in attention and expectation that allow us to notice and anticipate in less narrow ways and to be more open to the possibility of being surprised are morally productive when they make us more likely to notice calls to moral action, as in the case of sweatshop labour, that might have been obscured by our social position (e.g., our

position as wealthy that makes it harder to notice calls to action towards labour injustice). As a result of disorientations, agents can become more able to notice, reflect on, and feel curious about calls to action that we do not understand or would rather ignore. Just as I claimed that epistemological disorientations can alter both what we know and how we come to know it, disorientations in general can alter both what we think we are called to do and how we come to know what we are called to do—disorientations can cue us to pay attention differently or to new voices, as Servan-Schreiber’s disorientation prompted him to pay attention to the call to help his fellow patient in the parking lot, and as Pratt’s disorientation prompted her to pay attention to racialized individuals who were harmed by the legacy of her white family and neighbourhood. By doing so, disorientations can cue us to notice complex calls to action, like calls to act against complex injustice.

Further, calls to moral action are calls to respond individually and collectively to conditions created by communities structured by power and privilege. They are not just calls to direct perpetrators of easily isolable bad actions. They are calls for agents to act in forward looking ways in response to unjust structures as best we can from our particular positions within them, which will ideally involve some awareness of the likelihood that there are moral implications of our actions and position to which we are still blind. I have claimed that disorientations can produce shifts in the way we understand ourselves to be positioned with respect to power and privilege, partly through experiences of recognizing the contingency of norms (examples of bodily oppressions in chapter two), and felt powerlessness (examples of self-doubt in chapter four). Shifts in understanding ourselves as interdependently situated in frameworks of power and

privilege—my privilege depends on the powerlessness of others, I am already implicated—can be morally productive insofar as they can be crucial parts of coming to recognize calls to respond to conditions of injustice. Disorientations can be morally productive in helping agents better recognize their own implication in structures of injustice that call for complex individual and collective action. Recognitions of implication are not the only things required for agents to take up forward-looking responsibility; we also need to have some understanding of injustice as bad, and some form of investment in a more just future. Disorientations themselves cannot generate those investments.

D) Disorientation's Promise Given Moral Contexts Of Action

Moral action takes place within social contexts structured by frameworks of oppression, domination, and inequality. Given the multiplicity of our commitments – to environments, near and distant others, ourselves, our projects – the situations within which we are called to act often involve multiple, multi-layered, and sometimes conflicting calls to action. And even when calls to action do not themselves conflict, agents' resources of time, energy, attention, and material goods are limited. In chapters two to four I pointed to two effects of disorientations and can now clarify their moral relevance in light of these aspects of the real-world situation: disorientations can make agents aware of the contingency of norms and disorientation can prompt moral prioritizing.

In chapter two, I drew on examples of bodily unease to argue that disorientations can show how norms function in ways similar to how the breakdown or loss of a hammer shows its function: when Du Bois or Fanon becomes disoriented in body, they can come to notice norms which had until that point structured their experience more invisibly. Struggling to fit into normative (e.g., raced or gendered or fully abled) patterns of embodiment can highlight not only the ways norms function to support or burden individuals' lives, but also the way they do so *contingently*: the norms could be structured or enforced otherwise, indeed *are* otherwise in other spaces, and they change over time. Du Bois and Fanon come to recognize the contingency of norms through experiences of disorientation in part because the irregular enforcement of norms of racialization is disorienting. They highlight the racialization they experience as shifting from one context to the next; they are treated differently for being black in different spaces, during different historical moments, by different groups, and differently in keeping with different social roles. Du Bois experiences racism in certain ways when seeking work as a teacher in Tennessee (1996, 53), and in different ways later when grieving the death of his son in Georgia (1996, 172-175). Being treated badly *evenly* across spaces, time, and social contexts could be quite orienting; consistently bad treatment could generate reliable expectations and practices of response for the racialized individual, and could fail to draw his attention to the norms themselves. But the enforcement of contingent norms can be uneven, and being treated badly *unevenly* can be very disorienting—disrupting expectations sometimes even through the pleasant surprise of being treated with respect.

My claim is that becoming disoriented by the uneven enforcement of oppressive norms can help generate awareness of the norms and their contingency, which may in turn generate more accurate awareness of the normative landscape. For the most part, our norm-based expectations and beliefs do not change radically—but they can change, and in ways which improve our agency within harmful normative structures. Further, I am suggesting that gaining more accurate awareness of the contingency of norms, regardless of whether I am benefitted or harmed (or both) by a particular set of norms can allow for better moral action with respect to normative structures, often by strengthening resistance to them and persistent work to change them if they have worked against us, or by weakening strident and unquestioning maintenance of them if they have worked for us. Some of us more than others are harmed by contingent norms on the basis of concrete characteristics, often of our bodies. Disorientations can make us more aware of the ways oppressive norms are maintained and reinforced through habitual practices, and to that extent better able to see ourselves as implicated in the call to change them. As I claimed in chapter two, recognizing the contingency of one series of norms can make other series of norms questionable.⁹⁷

Beyond helping us recognize the contingency of norms, in chapters three and four I highlighted how experiences of disorientation can prompt the prioritizing of action. In

⁹⁷ It might be objected that better awareness of the contingency of norms will not necessarily generate better moral action in practice: it might make me grip more tightly to the enforcement of norms that harm others and benefit me for as long as possible. I do not deny this – and when it will be more or less likely to have such an effect falls under my general point about the impossibility of determining with certainty when disorientations will help as opposed to harm. A more meta-ethical objection might be made to the quick move from more accurate awareness of social situation to better moral action. I rely on a commitment to a view of agents as being generally motivated to participate in the social world in ways which allow for less rather than more suffering and friction over time, and as being motivated to correct incorrect understandings of the world and themselves, at least insofar as incorrect understandings can make social life more difficult in the long run, though someone could still deny that this is true.

the midst of the intense period after her husband died and before the end of her daughter's coma, Didion describes the experience of feeling streamlined in action in the midst of chaos and diverse demands, noting: "there had been every urgent reason to obliterate any attention that might otherwise have been paid, banish the thought, bring fresh adrenaline to bear on the crisis of the day" (Didion 2005, 143). As her marriage was ending and she was experiencing the most intense depression of her life to that point, Gilman describes the clarity she felt in understanding her responsibilities, projects, and the best next geographical and professional moves to make: "I set forth on October 8th [1887] with Katharine, Grace, [an] inadequate dressmaker, a large lunch-basket, my tickets, and all my remaining money in my pocket—ten dollars. 'What will you do when you get there?' asked anxious friends. 'I shall earn my own living.' 'How do you know you can?' 'I shall have to when I get there'" (Gilman 1972, 96-97, 104-106). I claimed early on that, like experiences of being lost in physical spaces, experiences of disorientation can compel or force us to prioritize our actions. If, as disoriented, I do not have a clear sense of my own moral agency, I can be motivated to ask: what needs of myself and others must be met? What is the most straightforward way to meet those needs? What am I most suited to doing? And so on. In a moral context where acting responsibly means responding to multiple, sometimes conflicting calls to action with limited resources at our disposal, disorientations can benefit moral agency by strengthening agents' capacities to prioritize actions. Disorientations can also guard against agents becoming dispersed, overwhelmed, and thereby ineffective in moral efforts.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Of course over-prioritization is also possible: returning to Descartes' imagery of doubt as deep water, lifeguards have noted that people in trouble in the water can benefit from the prioritization phenomenon –

Moral action is more likely to be effective, sustainable, and generative of more moral action in the future in conditions which support and promote collective and shared moral action; that is, by conditions that make it possible for agents to safely communicate, disagree, rely on, and learn from each other. Although good individuals may be more effective at some kinds of action alone, some kinds of moral action require collective as well as individual efforts, so contexts which support shared action rather than exclusively individual action will be better overall. Given that we always act morally in social contexts, around other people, and in response to social upbringing, and given that no action towards justice can succeed in isolation from the actions of others, effective moral action should be seen as fundamentally shared. I have highlighted ways in which disorientations can spur us to create and rely on relational frameworks (i.e., relationships and communities that we can depend on and gain insight from, particularly during periods where other aspects of life from which we may have drawn strength are compromised). Both online and with his close friends, Charles seeks insight and support through periods of unexpected effects of his gender transition. In chapter three, I considered situations in which disorientations can prompt us to create distance between ourselves and parts of our communities. In spurring such distance, disorientation can protect us from harm (or further harm), or from harming others. Affective disorientation can help us create spatial distance in ways which protect us as agents and help prevent us from acting unethically.

when panicked and disoriented they can think of one thing to do. But if that plan fails, they have trouble thinking of any other options. Disorientations can harm us in even more ways than the tradition has recognized.

Disorientations can inspire us to seek and create more reliable relational structures, which sometimes means seeking distance from harmful patterns and situations of shared action (e.g., from families, corporations, or religious groups in which we are prevented from sharing in action towards more just ends). Pratt's case is a good example of the need to seek distance, as she removes herself from the community that viewed her as wife and mother—the same community that made it possible for her husband to have custody of her children largely because she was a lesbian—in order to seek the supportive and challenging company of women and other activists. The moral emotions prompted by disorientations can help to generate relational structures which more accurately reflect and support individuals' needs. Given the need for social conditions that support shared action, to the extent that disorientations can enable agents to strengthen and improve conditions for shared action, disorientations can be morally productive.

Moral action is also likely to be effective, sustainable, and generative of more moral action in the future when it takes place within conditions which support moral risk. Some feminist philosophers have established the importance of recognizing and accepting the possibility of risk taking in moral agency (Babbitt 1999; Calhoun 1989; Card 1996): although risks taken for their own sake are not necessarily good for agency, moral risks can be good. Some moral contexts call for innovation—for example, facing new global challenges like climate change may require new ways of practicing joint responsibility across individuals, communities, and organizations with various resources—and moral conservatism could prevent us from developing adequate strategies to respond well to such a challenge. As Babbitt explains, “The commitment to moral risk may then be best

explained not by what one is committed to by some particular sort of promise, but rather by the kind of recognition of relevant impossibilities that can motivate a commitment to unrecognizable but probable possibilities in another direction” (1999, 253). Although a certain degree of moral conservatism (distinct from dogmatism) is necessary for social engagement and for developing appropriate expectations about what my moral actions are likely to do in most cases, taking risks can be a good thing. Even so, there is no apparent way to determine with certainty when risks will be good.

Although acting morally can require moral risk taking, I am not suggesting that we encourage risky moral action for its own sake. It is perhaps more often the case that risks are thrown upon us (rather than being things we consciously take on). Earlier I discussed tentativeness in individuals’ moral actions as an effective response to the fragility of the moral situation. Now I want to build on that point in order to claim that moral action in general is more likely to be effective the more tentativeness is structurally supported in moral contexts – in part by the concrete ways in which groups and institutions teach about moral agency, respond (e.g., in courts, in churches) to the actions of agents, fund activism, and recognize moral exemplars. The flip side of this is that moral action is less likely to be effective the more moral conservatism and dogmatism are made ideal. In some situations, we can be called to simultaneously be bold in taking risks with rethinking paths of action and to do so by carefully discussing and deliberating—that is, both risk-taking and tentativeness can be called for. For example, in ongoing Canadian efforts to recognize and become accountable for the harms committed against the First Nations people whose land we now inhabit, agents at various levels of moral and political

involvement can be called to both take risks in rethinking what it means to disrupt settler habits, and to tentatively proceed in discussions with others about how to re-evaluate land use in anti-colonialist ways. Disorientations can prompt us to foster conditions which structurally support moral risk and tentativeness when, often through more widespread experiences of disorientation (like the ones experienced in Laramie which I describe in the next chapter), disoriented groups come to recognize imperfect agents as moral exemplars and moral dogmatism as dangerous. These shifts can prompt the development of conditions which better anticipate and support moral risk and moral shortcomings, and the ways in which disorientations prompt such developments are morally productive.

Given the ways in which moral agents are relational, motivated by embodied and affective experience, and often keen to act stably even when acting morally requires greater risk, disorientations can benefit us by motivating more careful relational involvements, more sensitivity to the embodied and affective experiences and needs of ourselves and others, and better capacities to loosen rigid holds on identification and action in periods of insecurity. Given urgent calls to moral action in fragile conditions, disorientations can benefit agency by equipping us to notice and act in response to urgency and to become more tentative and less arrogant actors. Given that we are called to shared action in conditions structured by privilege, and that we receive calls differently depending on our expectations, disorientations can improve our response to such calls by making us more attentive to power structures and more able to notice unexpected or complicated calls to action. Given moral contexts structured by systemic injustice and limited resources for action, disorientations can benefit agency by highlighting the

contingency of current norms and by prompting moral prioritizing. Given that moral action is more likely to be effective in conditions where shared action is possible, moral risk-taking is supported, and moral shortcomings expected, disorientations can benefit agency by inspiring us to create better relational structures, to distance ourselves from harmful ones, and to foster conditions which support tentative actors.

A contrast case might help in summarizing my claims. Feminists have long been interested in Lawrence Kohlberg's empirical research into moral development, and there are parallels between my claim that disorientations can be morally beneficial and Kohlberg's claim that moral conflict can be needed for individuals to advance in the six stages of morality. Kohlberg holds that conflictedness can lead to moral progress and to challenging complacency through refinement of reflection:

Structural theory stresses that movement to the next stage occurs through reflective reorganization arising from sensed contradiction in one's current stage structure. Experiences of cognitive conflict can occur either through exposure to decision situations that arouse internal contradictions in one's moral reasoning structure or through exposure to the moral reasoning of significant others which is discrepant in content or structure from one's own reasoning...Real-life situations and choices vary dramatically in their potential for moral-cognitive conflict of a personal nature...One factor that appears to have precipitated the beginning of this shift was the college moratorium experience of responsibility and independence together with exposure to openly conflicting and relativistic values and standards...Other subjects changed in more dramatic moral situations which aroused conflict about

the adequacy of conventional morality. One subject, for example, moved from conventional to principled thinking while serving as an officer in Vietnam, apparently because of awareness of the conflict between law-and-order ‘Army morality’ and the more universal rights of the Vietnamese. (Kohlberg 1984, 202-203)

The most significant point of contrast between my view and Kohlberg’s is the emphasis on reflection: Kohlberg thinks that conflictedness can improve moral behaviour by expanding and maturing capacities for moral reflection, and I have argued that disorientations can improve moral behaviour in various ways, even when they compromise cognitive capacities for moral reasoning. I remain interested in the disorientations that regularly happen in our lives, often triggered by our social involvements, our bodies, or our environments, in ways which do more to change our ways of experiencing and acting than our ways of deliberating or following moral rules. Particularly by reminding us of our status as experiential bodies in complex environments, disorientations can help steer us away from the irresponsibilities of acting towards ourselves as though we are disembodied, towards others as though they are fungible, or towards the living world around us as though it is only a background. My claim is neither that disorientation is necessary for responsibility, nor (clearly) that it is sufficient. Rather, disorientations can have certain kinds of effects, and those effects can be productive for moral agency.

I have now drawn the connection between experiences of disorientation and moral agency in one direction: experiences of disorientation can support agents’ capacities to

act responsibly. In the examples I give, they help especially in cases where the best ethical action is not immediately clear, where it is difficult to become motivated to act in the best ethical ways, and where social support for moral action is sometimes challenged. My focus in the next section is on another direction of connection between experiences of disorientation and moral agency: acting responsibly can be disorienting.

3. Disorienting Responsibility: *When Acting Responsibly Can Be Disorienting*

To the extent that we are already aware of what is ethically desirable, clear about the ethical projects for which we are best suited, motivated to act in the best ethical ways, and socially well-supported in our pursuits, acting responsibly may not be disorienting for us as agents. But given how rarely all these conditions are met by us as individuals and communities, and given how complexly ethical awareness is raised, ethical projects are made accessible, moral motivation is established, and social support is secured, moral philosophers need to consider the details of what acting responsibly can feel like—specifically, we need to work from a sufficiently complex understanding of multidimensional aspects of experience to consider the need for a rich account of why acting responsibly can be disorienting.

If responsibilities can be so complex as these described, requiring action across levels of agency, extending beyond liability, often without clear aims or the guarantee that there is some amount of responsible action that will count as sufficient, moral theorists might well worry about how moral agents will fare in trying to address contexts

of injustice. We might worry about moral motivation in such contexts: if it is not clear what I should do, if I cannot act alone, if I have not created the bad conditions, and if there may never be an end-date, why would I be motivated to do anything?

Complacency, arrogance, denial of the problem could be real problems in such contexts.

We might worry further about moral understanding: it is not easy to know how to act in such contexts. Moral misunderstanding, ignorance, doubt can be real problems in such contexts. Even further, we might worry about capacities for acting well over time: overwhelm, burnout, paralysis, inter-personal or inter-institutional conflict can be real problems for moral action in such contexts. We are right to worry about these kinds of experiences in contexts where agents are working to responsibly address pervasive injustice. We also need to recognize the ways in which acting responsibly in such contexts is likely to be disorienting—where disorientation is importantly understood on my framework of being not necessarily a threat to moral agency.

Experiences of acting responsibly can involve experiences of disorientation.

Moreover, individuals and moral theorists should not be surprised when agents become disoriented precisely because they are attempting to act responsibly. In fact, given the reality of conflicting calls to action, the complexities of when they override each other, and the tenuousness of the moral landscape I have charted where the content of calls to action and the consequences of action in contexts of injustice can be unclear, responsible action might very often feel disorienting. I chart three complementary explanations for why acting responsibly can feel disorienting, particularly in contexts of injustice: acting responsibly can require that we face the partial indeterminacy of moral contexts in ways

which can be disorienting; acting responsibly can require inhabiting new relationships, situations, and environments in ways which can be disorienting; and acting responsibly can require creating and re-creating identities and affiliations in ways which can be disorienting. As a result, acting responsibly might more often feel like we don't know what we are doing but are doing something anyway than that we do know what we are doing and are doing it.

We have seen that in some cases of moral agency, what we are called to do and what is likely to result from our actions is more determinate than in others. Suppose I have intentionally taken something that belongs to you. If by giving it back to you, engaging in some form of trust-rebuilding, and participating in analysis of what went wrong to allow me to take it from you the first time I can re-establish rightful ownership and a functioning relationship, then it might be that the moral situation is clear. I am able to determine what to do and what is likely to happen. Even in relatively simple cases, however, the results of reparative work are not totally determinate: they cannot establish exactly the same situation we were in before, and we are not likely to be able to anticipate exactly the ways they will change the situation we share in the future.

What is most likely, Young thinks, is that some degree of both backward and forward looking responsibility is needed. Forward-looking responsibility is more attentive to calls to action that are not fully clear. People acting responsibly in such frameworks might feel disoriented precisely because of what it means to act responsibly. Knowing that I am called to act in the face of complex injustice can be deeply

disorienting. As I investigate the case in the next chapter, acting responsibly in response to the homophobic murder of one teenager by two other teenagers in my community is likely to disorient: I am unlikely to feel like I am at ease in acting. Disorientation may be experienced more vividly on epistemological and affective than embodied dimensions in such cases, through experiences of conflicting emotions or self-doubt, though unease and disrupted bodily habits may also be involved. Those who are prepared to act responsibly in forward-looking ways may be less likely to become disoriented by the need to act in moral situations that are not fully clear, though it seems that acting responsibly is likely to be disorienting even to such individuals. Recognizing the disorienting character of forward-looking responsibility, particularly in cases of overwhelming structural injustice, can help to further explain some tendencies to revert to more settling, liability-based behaviour – it could in some sense be easier to become experts at following moral rules (e.g., to punish the local manager of a sweatshop for its bad working conditions) than to cope with the complexities of doing our part.⁹⁹ Recognizing how disorienting it might be to act responsibly in this way could also explain some philosophers’ efforts to soothe readers about the ‘plague’ of unpredictable responsibilities their views might imply.¹⁰⁰ I

⁹⁹ I have claimed that we are rarely completely disoriented. I thank Jan Sutherland for pointing out the ways in which situations of war may be exceptional cases, where there can be very little left to ground feelings of being oriented. This may be one reason why the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (and perhaps others) has created an official position for a Director of Moral Orientation (currently held by Lieutenant General Kuol Deim Kuol).

¹⁰⁰ Walker asks: “Is there any end to the number and types of demands that on this view morally claim my attention?...Responsibility ethics might seem to defeat personally meaningful life ordering by visiting a veritable plague of commitments on each of us” (Walker 2007, 114). In the same vein, Young says: “Some people might object to the conception of political responsibility I have outlined on the grounds that it seems to make nearly everyone responsible for nearly everything...Surely it is asking too much, the objection runs, for each of us to worry about all these modes of participating in structures and how we might adjust our lives and relation to others so as to reduce their unjust effects...Just because we might find overwhelming the objective problems that call for responsibility and may feel ourselves inadequate to this call is not a reason to trim down moral claims to a more emotionally manageable size” (Young 2004, 383-384). Both Walker and Young focus on how to answer the question of how agents should proceed given what can seem like an anxiety-causing plague of responsibilities. Neither considers experiences of

am instead trying to acknowledge how deeply unpredictable responsibilities can shape our experiences of being moral agents—in complexly difficult and intriguing ways—and offer a view of how the ways they shape our experience can also shape our possibilities and areas of action for the better.

Beyond the complex ways in which acting responsibly can feel disorienting because of how it feels to act in complicated moral contexts, moral action can also be tangibly disorienting when it involves inhabiting (and sometimes creating) new kinds of environments, relationships, and social situations that we do not yet know how to navigate. Descriptions of what it is like to navigate new moral contexts echo chapter two's descriptions of disorientations which involved phenomenologies of being lost in new environments, without habitual patterns of movement or ease with the objects around us. Casey emphasized the orientedness that comes from body memory in physical environments (1987, 149-153); when we enter new environments or situations, we do not always have felt orientedness to draw on. Acting responsibly can require that we work with individuals that make us uncomfortable for any number of reasons: they may be unlike us, or they may be very like us and therefore more able to reveal our faults. We may need to enter into relationships with people who make us uncomfortable because of our racial, gender, sexual, or class differences (e.g., perhaps someone takes on work to advocate for herself and others in low income families and all of a sudden needs to talk to a high-income government worker who has voluntarily taken interest in her cause – both people could feel disoriented). Acting responsibly can often mean becoming involved in

overwhelm in the face of calls to action as themselves morally relevant—neither considers how disorientations in such contexts could be productive parts of agents' moral processes.

uncomfortable relationships, often needing to become vulnerable within them, and in many cases needing to remain engaged in them for a long time if the joint projects are to be successful. In chapter three, I gave the example of the affective disorientation that can arise when someone with a lot of power in a workplace, accustomed to certain kinds of affective freedom (e.g., get angry whenever she likes) and restriction (e.g., never show fear), comes to recognize and share power and privilege more responsibly. Being more responsible might involve being less sure of how to experience and express emotions. Her moral action might make for awkward interactions, unease around colleagues and friends, and a rocky period of adjustment for everyone involved. Acting responsibly can involve inhabiting old social spaces in new ways, and/or creating new social spaces, and both of these things can mean that we face disorientations as we relearn how to act, speak, move, and expect within them.

In addition to requiring that we inhabit new kinds of relationships and social situations, acting morally very often requires creating and inhabiting new *identities* and self-understandings. Sometimes it can also require recreating or re-adopting parts of identities I have inhabited in the past and deliberately (sometimes adamantly) left behind (e.g., identifications with certain families, cultural affiliations, religions, or nationalities). In general, the roles we find ourselves needing to take in order to be responsible can be surprising to us. We might think of a social worker who becomes involved in activist work in prisons, or a physician who decides to volunteer at Planned Parenthood in situations where women decide whether or not to terminate pregnancies. The social worker might feel less certain of his identity when challenged by those in prison. The

physician might not know how to position herself in contexts where women are considering maintaining unplanned pregnancies. Acting responsibly in ways which go against the grain of our tendencies, personalities, or some of our convictions, can be very disorienting insofar as they can require that we develop new ways of inhabiting and growing into our identities. The kinds of joint action contexts of injustice require can be disorienting insofar as they can require us to rethink our individual capacities for action and task organization (e.g., it can be disorienting to see my responsibility as involving a task that looks very far from the heart of a particular activism, for example, soliciting funds from a corporation).

We might find examples of disorienting responsibility in situations of various kinds of moral action, from what seem like more minor identifications and actions to more major shifts. For example, a man might decide to act calmly, collaboratively, and sensitively when dealing with his angry and argumentative siblings after the death of their parents. His siblings might be fighting over every detail of the will and estate, encouraging other family members to take sides, disregarding each others' needs and grief in efforts to get as much money as possible out of the situation. These actions may even be expressions of their own grief. The man might decide to act more gently and responsively out of a sense of responsibility to maintaining the family, to what his parents would have wanted, to the future of the family in the life of his nieces and nephews, and so on. Such a decision might require re-envisioning his identity within the family: he might not know who he is in the role of the peacemaker. He might not recognize himself in the kinds of things he says, in the traits he is cultivating. His sense of self/identity

might take some time to catch up with his actions, particularly when those actions do not come easily to him. The lag, and the experiences of coming to recognize himself more and more as the one who is slow to anger and willing to put the family above his own potential to gain, can be disorienting. In this way, coming to act more responsibly can involve coming to inhabit new identities, and the processes of doing so can be disorienting. In order to act responsibly, we can need to take some distance from assumptions we have made about the kinds of people we are and the kinds of talents or faults we have – identifying thoughtlessly, assuming that certain moral behaviours come easily to us, or insisting on particular roles in joint political projects can threaten the efficacy of the moral action of ourselves and others. Acting responsibly can involve shifts in ways of seeing ourselves, or attempts to see ourselves differently, that can be importantly disorienting.

New ways of acting responsibly can be further disorienting when they prompt us to consider re-identifications with communities or parts of our past: it might even be that I am called to re-cultivate or remember affiliations or parts of my history that I purposely set aside earlier. Things I learned from lower class upbringing might have been set aside in pursuit of upward mobility, maybe into a career that would have been inaccessible to me if I continued to embody the tell-tale signs of my class (my accent, my diet, my style, my aesthetic tastes). I might feel disoriented as I gradually re-identify with them in processes of doing responsible political work: maybe the social worker came from a disproportionately imprisoned community himself. Or parts of my past family and religious affiliations (e.g., white, Catholic) might have been set aside when I became

politically concerned about them, and interested in acting in solidarity with the groups my family or religious community shunned (e.g., blacks, queers). Sue Campbell highlights the complexity of disaffiliations and the political promise of some critical re-affiliations, drawing on María Lugones to argue that acting responsibly can mean identifying with the group others see us as part of, particularly when the group others see me as part of is an oppressing group, and when those others belong to those who have been oppressed. As she claims, “If the victims see me as part of the group collectively responsible and I cannot see myself that way, I will fail to fully understand how they see me. I may be confused at their rejection of my outrage on their behalf, failing to grasp that from their standpoint, this outrage simply manifests my failure to understand their perspective on the harm and their moral demand for my responsibility” (Campbell, “Remembering Who We Are,” 8). I might feel disoriented as I gradually re-identify with aspects of the group I have distanced myself from for a long time: maybe the physician, now an abortion provider, was raised Catholic and once had fierce anti-abortion politics herself. Realizing and inhabiting new identifications as prompted by responsible behaviour – in everyday scenarios as well as more politicized ones – can be disorienting. Remembering, re-identifying with, or taking responsibility for past identifications can also be disorienting.

Still too many understandings of responsibility and virtue suppose that the best moral agents will be the least likely to experience deep-seated moral conflict or hesitation and most likely to have immediate and/or clear senses of their moral sensibilities and best actions. We (as agents and theorists) should not take feelings of disorientation automatically as cues to the non-adequacy, or non-morality of action. I think this is not

far from what some ethical accounts encourage us to do – encouraging us to think that acting morally means acting in ways where we feel oriented. Orientedness can be taken to indicate moral action in either pleasurable or unpleasurable ways: sometimes we might feel oriented in ways which feel pleasurable, joyful, and right, so acting morally should feel orienting and good; at other times (perhaps more often) we may feel oriented in ways which feel nevertheless difficult, unpleasant, or like a struggle against our wills, so acting morally should feel orienting, like being sure of the right direction, even when it doesn't feel easy or good. We might think here of Aristotle's vision of the virtuous man as the one who cultivates consistency of moral habits, which reliably motivate balanced, excellent action. Or we can think, for example, of Kant's account of moral deliberation and action as better the more immediate and unhesitating they are, of moral agents like Job being more exemplary the more steadfast and firm standing they are, even in the face of situations which bewilder (Kant 1996, Critique of Practical Reason). Kant suggests the importance of a non-positive felt contentment that sets us at ease:

Have we not, however, a word that does not denote enjoyment, as the word happiness does, but that nevertheless indicates a satisfaction with one's existence, an analogue of happiness that must necessarily accompany consciousness of virtue? Yes! This word is *contentment with oneself*...Freedom, and the consciousness of freedom as an ability to follow the moral law with an unyielding disposition...so far as I am conscious of this freedom in following our moral maxims, it is the sole source of an unchangeable contentment. (Kant 1996, 234)

This passage highlights the supposition that experiences of feeling oriented, as though our will is aligned with itself, should be taken as confirmation of our being morally in the right. Frankfurt too works from such an assumption:

If ambivalence is a disease of the will, the health of the will is to be unified and in this sense wholehearted. A person is volitionally robust when he is wholehearted in his higher-order attitudes and inclinations, in his preferences and decisions, and in other movements of his will. This unity entails no particular level of excitement or warmth. Wholeheartedness is not a measure of the firmness of a person's volitional state, or of his enthusiasm. What is at issue is the organization of the will, not its temperature. (Frankfurt 1999, 100)

Although sometimes acting responsibly can feel orienting, at other times it can feel disorienting and *still be responsible action*. Becoming less surprised at how disorienting it can feel to act responsibly—including shifts in 'temperature' and swings in temperament (e.g., affective swells)—is likely to take time and more than philosophical work. As I suggest in the conclusion of the thesis, changes in social conditions might be needed.

If my claims about the ways in which responsible action can feel disorienting are correct, we should not maintain an ideal of moral agency as, in the best cases, involving felt orientation or disorientation only on the path to more orientedness. Though it may seem common-sensical that we should always want to resolve discomfort and feel oriented, I am arguing that responsible moral agents may be those who accept and even welcome occasions of disorientation as a condition of responsibility without turning their

attention to seeking resolution or ease. Misreadings of moral agency as being better when it involves feeling oriented than when it involves feeling disoriented is both an ethical and a moral concern: in theory, it can make for and motivate inaccurate, troubling ethical accounts that parallel what is inaccurate and troubling about views of selfhood and agency that overlook and oversimplify major aspects of experience; and in practice, it can make for troubling moral action, where the kinds of actions and agents that are favoured are those that are the ones that feel most oriented, and possible benefits of disorientations are overlooked in efforts to make for more moral action in communities. Such misreadings can offer one piece of insight into why, in practical terms, disorientations might be counteracted, and individuals or groups who are either more disoriented or more susceptible to disorientation than others are often segregated or punished (e.g., people who are migrants, racialized, or mentally ill).

Before concluding, I want to highlight a passage from Butler that speaks to my claim of disorientation as a crucial part of experienced agency. Butler explains the disorientation that can accompany moral agency – or in her terms, accountability—this way:

Because norms emerge, transform, and persist according to a temporality that is not the same as the temporality of my life, and because they also in some ways sustain my life in its intelligibility, the temporality of norms interrupts the time of my living. Paradoxically, it is this interruption, this disorientation of the perspective of my life, this instance of an indifference in sociality, that nevertheless sustains my living...I am interrupted by my own social origin, and so have to find a way to take

stock of who I am in a way that makes clear that I am authored by what precedes and exceeds me, and that this in no way exonerates me from having to give an account of myself. But it does mean that if I posture as if I could reconstruct the norms by which my status as a subject is installed and maintained, then I refuse the disorientation and interruption of my narrative that the social dimension of those norms imply. (Butler 2005, 35, 82)

At the heart of this passage is Butler's commitment to a vision of the moral world as exceeding my capacities, awareness, and expectations by virtue of its temporality and relationality. Butler's suggestion is complex: disorientation here accompanies the realization of my temporal situation between the past that has made me the person I am, but that is not something I can ever fully know, and the yet-to-be determined future into which I am acting. In the midst of this, I am called to identify myself, an action of central moral importance, and for which I alone am responsible. The act of identification (which happens again and again, ongoing over time) is disorienting, but a disorientation that should not be refused: to refuse it is to deny how socially situated I am. It is this social situatedness, and the richness of my experience within it, that create the disorientation that sustains my living. What would it mean to think seriously of disorientation as something that sustains rather than threatens my life as a moral agent? If we thought of tangible disorientations – Servan-Schreiber's illness, Didion's grief, Gilman's self-doubt – as sustaining rather than threatening, how could that change the way we inhabit them?

4. Conclusions

My account in this chapter focuses on the ways in which the disorientations that come to us can be productive insofar as they are experiences which can motivate better ways of being and acting, and better contexts and communities in which to act. If it is right to think that as moral agents we can become better, become worse, or stay the same, disorientations tend to eliminate the option of staying the same; the tradition has done a lot to emphasize how they can make us worse, and I am working to show that they can make us better. Following Braidotti from the article cited at the beginning of this chapter, Sara Ahmed suggests the following: “Perhaps the relationship between leadership and suffering is only paradoxical if we assume that suffering is stifling. We learn from what Braidotti rightly points out: those who have been undone by suffering can be the agents of ethical transformation” (Ahmed 2010, 216).

Adequate accounts of moral agency must allow for the promise of disorientation. Many conceptions of responsibility, including social connectionist models, do not yet meet this requirement. Such neglect is in large part due to inadequate focus on the connections between our capacities for moral action and our *experiences*; more nuanced analyses of experienced moral agency are needed. In addition to the regular ways that everyday moral agency requires acting from practiced, stable moral habits, moral growth may *require* experiences of disorientation.¹⁰¹ Before we can attend to that possibility, we need to secure a vision of orientedness as an important part of moral motivation, but not always good for agency, a clear characterization of what disorientations are, and a

¹⁰¹ Kohlberg offers a similar argument from his empirical consideration of why some forms of disorientation can be required for the growth of moral reasoning (1984, 202-203).

compelling account of the potential promise of disorientations for moral agency. Doing that work is the project of this thesis.

In this chapter, I have worked from my account of dimensions of disorientation (chapters two to four), and particular vision of the moral landscape to draw two main connections between disorientations and moral agency: disorientations can benefit moral agency, and acting morally can be disorienting. In my final chapter, I will suggest that we may have a responsibility to reside in (rather than resist or refuse) disorientations, and that particular kinds of social conditions can shape our experiences of disorientation in important ways, with some kinds of conditions being more hospitable to disorientations, and thus more likely to help us benefit from and reside in them than others. First, I turn to a sustained consideration of the collective disorientation experienced by residents of Laramie, Wyoming after the 1998 murder of gay university student Matthew Shepard. I suggest a way of thinking of what happened in response to Shepard's death as a form of *sexual disorientation* which unsettles the kind of sexualities the community had valued and protected. Sometimes the most difficult contexts to make hospitable to disorientation are those within which shared orientedness is assumed: homes and hometowns.

Chapter Six: Disorientation And The Politics of Desire

While the size of the protest in midtown surprised even its organizers, the evocation of anger and sadness on the streets of New York was not unique. Candlelight vigils have been held across the country, from Washington to Grand Junction, Colo., Raleigh, N.C., and Lubbock, Tex. In San Francisco, the giant rainbow flag in the Castro district that symbolizes the gay rights movement was lowered to half staff. The Internet has been filled with discussion of the crime. Last night, 1,000 people attended an hour long prayer service for Mr. Shepard at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in Manhattan. The cause of the passion, participants say, is a sense that even as gay people have become more accepted than ever, there are reminders of the hatred and violence of the not-so-distant past. Well before Mr. Shepard's killing, an increase in police reports of anti-gay crimes in New York City had unsettled gay people, shaking them out of complacency in the years since the height of AIDS activism.

(Michael Cooper *New York Times*, 1998)

We now have a framework for understanding disorientations as multi-dimensional and morally relevant parts of individuals' experience. In this chapter, I establish disorientations' political promise in a particular social context; I claim that heteronormativity makes it difficult and often dangerous to be queer, and disorientations can prompt action towards less heteronormative socio-sexual contexts.

In *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others* (2006), Sara Ahmed analyses queer lives against the background of heteronormative social contexts that

privilege straightness and harm non-heterosexual individuals, practices, and communities. Heteronormativity creates social conditions that harm queers, and such contexts are in need of political attention. There are crucial political questions about how queer and non-queer individuals should act in contexts of sexual injustice. Writing from this particular moment in queer history, Ahmed introduces an understanding of disorientations' relation to queerness: queer individuals tend to become disoriented when they try to live non-normative sexualities in heteronormative social contexts, and these disorientations can be part of what inspires them to leave heteronormative inheritances to create queer lives that do not reproduce these inheritances. Taking Ahmed's book as a jumping off point, my project in this chapter is to build on my account of disorientation to suggest an alternative connection between disorientations and sexual injustice: queer and non-queer individuals experience disorientations in socio-sexual contexts, and these and other disorientations can prompt us all to create less heteronormative sexual inheritances. Heteronormativity harms non-queers as well as queers, both queers and non-queers experience disorientations in socio-sexual contexts, and disorientations can prompt both queers and non-queers to work toward better sexual contexts for everyone.

The multi-dimensional disorientations I have clarified are common in socio-sexual contexts. For example, shifts in understandings of who should engage in sexual relationships (e.g., monogamous, heterosexual couples vs. more casual, open or poly-sets of people; only when people are of the same racial identity or not), when (e.g., only after a certain age or marriage), for how long (e.g., long-term vs. short-term), and why (e.g., only as expressions of commitment or love; only when pregnancy is desired) can be

disorienting for sexual agents.¹⁰² We can see how such disorientation might result after a connection between heterosexual intercourse and pregnancy is established, with widespread availability of oral contraceptives, when US high schools first became desegregated, when Ellen DeGeneres came out as lesbian, or, as I focus on, when tragic homophobic violence affects individuals in communities. Disorientation can be prompted when, by any number of events or mechanisms, assumptions about what is sexually acceptable are called into question. In theorizing disorientations in heteronormative sexual contexts, I am interested in establishing how they can make possible less restrictive ethical frameworks regarding sexuality in general, and how they can help to generate anti-heteronormative activism in particular. The harms that result from some sexual norms are serious and in need of political attention. The same harms that make queer couples afraid to hold hands in subway stations are those that sometimes make suicide seem like the only viable option for teenagers in contexts of anti-gay bullying. I take the events and work that have occurred in and around Laramie, Wyoming in the years since Matthew Shepard's death resulting from an anti-gay hate crime as a case for illustrating this—a case that also shows how disorientation alone typically can neither inspire the involvement of everyone, nor secure all the political progress we need.

In section one, I outline the way the norms and underlying assumptions of heteronormativity harm queer and non-queer individuals. In section two, I outline individuals' disorientations in socio-sexual contexts, characterizing them on axes of

¹⁰² See Tuana 2004 for an analysis of some important historical shifts in sexual contexts. I use some language related to sexual identity interchangeably here: I take it that queer sexualities involve queerness along some or all of a person's sexual identification (e.g., as 'lesbian'), practices, and desires.

body, affect, and knowledge, and making explicit not only queer but also non-queer experiences of disorientation. In section three, I establish my account of how individuals' experiences of disorientations can help us create less heteronormative, more politically adequate social contexts. Here, I build on the last chapter's arguments about the moral promise of disorientations to establish the political promise of disorientations given the harms of heteronormativity. My interest throughout is in non-queer as well as queer experiences of disorientation in socio-sexual contexts, motivated by my sense that the creation of better sexual inheritances is not a responsibility that falls to queers alone, and by my commitment to the view that many kinds of disorientation may be promising in helping us create better sexual inheritances. As in my analysis of disorientation overall, it is not my project to claim that queers and non-queers *ought* to experience disorientations in socio-sexual contexts so much as to detail the ways they already do.

1. The Harms Of Heteronormativity

Sexual norms are sometimes expressed through negative imperatives: do not be queer; do not have sex before it is sanctioned by church, state, or both; do not be a woman who is too sexually active (promiscuous); do not be a woman who is not sexually active enough (prude); do not be a man who is shy about sex; do not be sexually active too young; do not be sexually active too old; do not have sex with people who are outside your proper group (i.e., different from you in financial or social status, race, religion, class, age, ability-status, or nationality); do not have repugnant sex; do not be uninterested in sex altogether; and sometimes do not express sexual agency at all (e.g., if disabled or

otherwise found to be lacking in body autonomy). Of course, some restrictive sexual norms are ones most of us endorse: pedophilia involves a set of sexual practices that we should want to restrict. In such cases, sexual norms may be restrictive without unjustly harming those they restrict. Not every restriction is unjustly harmful. But restrictions which systematically prevent individuals from self- and other-enriching relationships and the capacities for joy, growth, and meaningful life that they allow are unjustly harmful. Some systematically restrictive norms, such as the heteronorms at issue here, unjustly harm those who transgress them, and in ways individuals with commitments to anti-oppressive politics should work against.

Queer theorists and philosophers of sexuality of the last 25 years have clarified the harms of heteronormativity (Butler 1999; Calhoun 2002; Cvetkovich 2003; Dean 2000; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Halberstam 2005; Martin 1993; McWhorter 1999; Rich 1993; Sedgwick 1990; Zita 1998). Ahmed (2006) explores the concept of orientation from a phenomenological stance, and highlights the ways in which many of the restrictive sexual norms – in particular, heteronorms – are *inheritances*. We inherit such norms from our families and communities, and our actions and identifications come to be shaped by them in subtle and sometimes explicit ways. Ahmed focuses in particular on the way sexual inheritances harm queer individuals who struggle to fit within them. In Ahmed's terms, the combination of what is socially expected of us, initially inherited by us, and repeatedly practiced by us, shapes our bodies, firms up our orientations, and directs our desires. Compulsory orientations, when successful, make some actions seem necessary and others impossible. I find Ahmed's concept of 'inheritance' useful and will

carry it through my own analysis of harmful sexual norms and the political promise of disorientations in light of them. Although many harmful sexual norms are not heteronorms, like Ahmed, the harms which interest me most here are those which result from heteronormativity and its underlying assumptions.

Sometimes using inheritance and genealogy interchangeably,¹⁰³ Ahmed claims that heterosexual desire is grounded in and by a “conventional genealogy” (2006, 107). As she explains, “I have linked the compulsion to become straight to the work of genealogy, which connects the line of descent between parents and children with the affinity of the heterosexual couple, as the meeting point between the vertical and horizontal lines of the family tree” (2006, 92). Queer lives are distanced from reach when a lesbian phys-ed teacher is given a desk down the hall and around the corner from the change rooms, away from the other teachers’ office, and is never allowed to coach female students. When a caregiver fixes a white dishtowel to my head and tells me to “go play wedding” with a boy from preschool, heterosexual imperatives are even more explicitly endorsed. As Ahmed puts it, “insofar as we inherit that which is near enough to be available at home, we also inherit orientations, that is, we inherit the nearness of certain objects” (2006b, 86). Following Adrienne Rich (1993), Ahmed discusses “compulsory orientations” as those sexual orientations that our inheritances make seem necessary, preventing us from “imagining ourselves otherwise.”¹⁰⁴ Inheritance, for Ahmed, involves both direction and force: familial inheritances both direct and push us toward heterosexual objects, directing us by modeling and affirming the salience of

¹⁰³ See Ahmed 2006, 146, 178.

¹⁰⁴ This phrase is from Mackenzie 2000.

heterosexual attention, and pushing us by attaching fear, guilt and failure to any refusal to practice heterosex (2006, 90). Ahmed depicts ways in which sexual orientation can be a response to what kinds of objects are initially within reach. The directions of our sexual orientations can depend, in large part, on the directions in which we are initially taught to reach; objects can direct orientations insofar as the objects initially within our reach can be the objects our bodies become oriented toward reaching. Following Adrienne Rich's (1993) discussion of compulsory heterosexuality, Ahmed discusses "compulsory orientations" as sexual orientations which become compulsory given our inheritances (Ahmed 2006, 84). When we inherit what is within reach, and that which is brought within reach reflects only one possible orientation, Ahmed identifies that orientation as compulsory:

I would suggest that we consider heterosexuality as a compulsory orientation...It is the presumption that the child must inherit the life of the parents that requires the child to follow the heterosexual line...When parents imagine the life they would like for their child, they are also imagining what they will 'give' to the child as a gift that becomes socially binding. (Ahmed 2006, 84-85)

Compulsory heterosexuality means that children inherit and often grow to imagine for themselves permanently heterosexual lives.

Although I agree with Ahmed that compulsory heterosexuality harms queers and benefits non-queers, there are a number of reasons why compulsory heterosexuality also harms non-queers. In one sense, compulsory heterosexuality regularly harms non-queers by virtue of their relationships with queers: when queerness is illegitimate, ignored, or

unprotected, not only are queers harmed on various axes (bodily, psychological, financial), but such norms can harm their children, parents, families, friends, neighbours, colleagues, and so on. The children of queers can be more susceptible to scrutiny or bullying at school. The parents of a queer adult can be forced to choose between disowning their child in order to stay within conservative churches or supporting their child and losing the fellowship of a church community they love; parents of queer children are also more likely to experience the serious harms of violence towards their kids, from minor experiences of bullying to major hate crimes. Neighbours who choose to own houses in openly queer parts of town may risk loss of property value or reduced quality of education in schools nearby (though we also know that, in places where gentrification follows ‘the gay village’, the opposite can happen). Colleagues or business owners who hire, mentor, or promote queer individuals can be subject to ridicule from homophobes in positions of greater power. Harms of heteronormativity intersect with oppression and privilege in other domains of individuals’ lives: a white gay male may be less likely to suffer in terms of employment opportunities than a First Nations’ lesbian.¹⁰⁵ Just as not all queer individuals are harmed equally by heteronormativity, not all individuals in relationships with queer individuals are susceptible to equal harms. The child of partnered, middle class lesbians may be less likely to be harmed than the children of a single, underemployed queer man. My point is not to specify the distinctions of harm experienced by those in relationship with queer individuals; rather, I want to

¹⁰⁵ In “‘At Least I’m Not Gay’” (2007) Carissa Froyum takes up the intersection between race and heteronormativity in young black teens, showing how in some cases teens can police queer sexual identifications more strongly the more marginalized they are given other aspects of their identities.

highlight that the heteronorms which harm queer individuals and benefit non-queer individuals can also harm non-queer individuals.¹⁰⁶

In another sense, compulsory heterosexuality harms both queers and non-queers by virtue of its misconceived and restrictive presumptions about sexual identity in general – these can be the presumptions on which we base concrete activity (as I explain below) even if we do so unconsciously rather than explicitly.¹⁰⁷ Heteronorms which dictate that straight identifications are best and should be socially favoured are based in part on three misunderstandings of the sexual identities of everybody: in particular, on misunderstandings of sexual identities as static and fixed, of desire as originating solely in the individual, and of sexual identifications as things that can be limited the more deviant bodies are prevented from practicing them. These misunderstandings of all individuals' sexualities have the potential to harm everyone.

First, the assumption that sexual identities are static and fixed allows straight individuals to feel protected from the possibility of ever becoming queer, which would put them at risk of facing the harms of heterosexism. There are, of course, homophobes (e.g., at anti-gay church camps) who advocate for queers to change (i.e., correct) their sexual identities, which on one level looks like they take sexual identities to be open to change; this might mean that they take queer identities (and not straight identities) to be changeable, though I think they more likely think that all sexual identities are meant to be

¹⁰⁶ One could give a more familiar argument for this: heteronorms harm everyone because they push down a productive part of the population, making them less likely to be productive members of society. While true, this is not the argument I give.

¹⁰⁷ Christine Overall (1990) examines ways in which assumptions of compulsory heterosexuality can have troubling effects especially for heterosexual women.

static and fixed and that queer individuals have mistaken their true identities, which are straight. For the most part, sexual identities are taken to be fixed or fixable. I am working with an understanding of sexual orientations as the complex, dynamic stances we inhabit toward specific sexual possibilities and practices—I share the view with some philosophers of sexuality that sexual desires and identifications have the potential to change at any point in our lives.¹⁰⁸ Assuming that our sexualities are static and fixed harms not only all those whose sexualities have changed (e.g., harms on a spectrum of severity, experienced through ridicule, distrust, lack of psychological and emotional support, lack of structural support when such shifts have prompted shifts out of marriages, etc.), but also all those whose sexualities may change. Sexual identifications are, at least to some extent, fluid; individuals are harmed when they are taken to be static and fixed.

Second, working from the assumption that desire originates in the individual allows anti-queer activists to distance themselves not only from experiences of queer desire, but also from any involvement in its cultivation; the presumption isolates each individual as the only possible source of deviant desire, and so leaves non-queer individuals uninvolved in the cultivation of queer desire and free to campaign against it. The origins of desire get individualized at various levels: sometimes through genetic arguments (e.g., the search for the gay gene), sometimes through otherwise socio-biological arguments (e.g., locating queerness in other animal populations), sometimes through psychological arguments (e.g., children who experienced sexual trauma may be

¹⁰⁸ I argue elsewhere (Harbin forthcoming) for a view of sexual authenticity as involving dynamic sexuality. There, I draw on Dean (2000, 237-238), Zita (1998, 135) and McWhorter (1999, 105). Questions of sexual fluidity are also recently considered by Diamond 2008.

more likely to grow up queer), and sometimes through arguments from personality (e.g., being queer is just who I am, I have always known it to be true). And yet this neglects the ways queer desire, like non-queer desire, is socially situated, and is allowed for in part by our socio-cultural contexts; this threatens to isolate queer individuals as each responsible for their own deviance. Even if, as is likely, our social frameworks make queer desire possible differently than they do non-queer desire, and even if they make it possible while at the same time making it seem impossible, queer desire must be seen as allowed for in large part by the self-understandings we inherit from our families and communities.¹⁰⁹ Individualizations of the origins of queer desire pave the way for individualized punishments and strategies for ‘healing’, or perhaps in the best of bad cases, for a mentality of ‘she can’t help it,’ or ‘let gays do whatever they want, but they don’t need to have a parade about it.’ The origins of sexual desire are, at least to some extent, social; individuals are harmed when they are taken to be solely individual.

Finally, working from the assumption that restricting or requiring certain kinds of sexual expression can lessen the occurrence of the wrong kind of sexual desire, increase the right kind, or stunt the development of ‘improper’ sexual identities, justifies anti-queer individuals’ efforts to make openly queer behaviour dangerous. This is an assumption about motivation and desire: that particular mainstream incentives (e.g., becoming the happy straight couple from bank commercials) can override deviant desires. When heterosexual couples are the only ones used in public school safe-sex discussions, there can be an assumption at work that the fewer examples of safe queer

¹⁰⁹ Queer desire is depicted by Ahmed as a major actor — she characterizes desire as something which generates, provides, acts, allows, works, reworks, moves, shows, shapes, teaches, attaches, embraces, inspires, requires, impacts, changes, challenges, necessitates, and ends (2006b, 79-107).

lives queer kids are given, the more likely they will be to develop into happily heterosexual adults. But this assumption is mistaken in its understanding of the interaction of motivation, sexual desire, and self-identification: queer or not, we very often have to negotiate simultaneous motivations to act in different directions. When part of what motivates us is grounded in visceral, bodily desire and/or strong senses of the kind of people we are and the kind of relationships most likely to sustain us, conflicting incentives can be clear to us without overriding our identifications. The underlying presumption can therefore motivate unsuccessful but nonetheless deeply harmful action: queer kids can grow into queer adults, only after surviving many years of socially sanctioned torment. Asexual individuals can establish the support of their families only after feigning intimacy in non-sexual marriages. Hetero individuals can keep hidden the particularities of their sexual desires from partners for years for fear of being found perverse. Sexual desire is, at least to some extent, resilient; individuals are harmed when their non-harmful desires (i.e., non-pedophilic, etc.) are treated as socially undesirable and able to be curbed.

The three underlying presumptions have in common a spirit of simplicity and control: they suggest that it is easy to understand sexual identification given what we already know, that processes of sexual identification remain stable across diverse social and historical situations, and that troublesome sexual identifications are and should be controllable at the individual level, by internal and/or external mechanisms like self-discipline and social exclusion. In actuality, theorists have not yet formulated sufficiently complex understandings of the fluidity, social origins, and resilience of sexual desire.

Besides the fact that these presumptions have been shown false by queer and sexuality theorists in a variety of empirical and non-empirical disciplines, I want to secure an understanding of these presumptions as things which harm *all* sexual agents, whether or not we identify or act queerly. The assumptions built into heteronormative inheritances harm everybody, and get perpetuated in part through compulsory heterosexuality.

2. Disorientations In Socio-Sexual Contexts

On Ahmed's analysis, sexual *disorientations* are experienced as uncertainty about, instability in, or unsettlement in living out, given sexual orientations. As sexually disoriented, we can feel dislocated from the sexual possibilities available to us and unsure of how to relocate ourselves with respect to the kinds of people and practices we find sexually salient. Positioned this way, the people who most often become sexually disoriented are queer individuals.¹¹⁰ Against the background of compulsory orientations, "Queer subjects, when faced by the 'comforts' of heterosexuality may feel uncomfortable...Discomfort is a feeling of disorientation: one's body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled" (Ahmed 2004, 148).¹¹¹ Ahmed provides a rich phenomenological account of sexual disorientations that can be experienced as a result of living outside of inherited sexual norms: such disorientations are experienced as a result of trying to live a non-normative sexual identity within communities and political frameworks that are still

¹¹⁰ The queerness Ahmed characterizes is only partly sexual—in many of Ahmed's descriptions, it is the experience of being a member of non-normative social groups or border communities. We are often noted as queer when we highlight functioning norms (of bodily appearance, shape, movement, or relations) by not fitting within them. Although I am most interested in queerness in the context of sexual desire, identity, and politics, Ahmed's analysis of the racialization of the Orient shows that her phenomenology of queer experience can be applied to a variety of embodiments.

¹¹¹ The phrase 'sexual disorientation' also appears in Moon 1998 and Wilton 2004.

predominantly heteronormative. The disorientations signal difficulty in orienting toward proper objects: objects of desire, and objects to strive toward in life (e.g., certain versions of family and home life). Not having access to the same examples, open discussions, familial role-models, or images of their future, queer kids can struggle to orient themselves in processes of sexual desire, action, and self-identification.

Although Ahmed and I share theoretical interests in the promise of experiences of disorientation and political interests in the development of more just contexts for queers, our characterizations of disorientations and their potential for benefitting anti-heteronormative politics are distinct. Ahmed and I both move beyond the everyday understanding of ‘orientation’ as roughly synonymous with ‘preference’ in sexual contexts. Ahmed offers phenomenological characterizations of sexual orientation as an agent’s movement towards certain sexual objects and sexual disorientation as an agent’s experience of discomfort when straying from acceptable patterns of sexual action. I offer a characterization of disorientations in sexual contexts as involving the three dimensions of body, affect, and knowledge, and being triggered by more than just sexual desire, experienced by agents in contexts other than just those of sexual action. Ahmed thinks that being queer requires embracing discomfort and disorientation. I think we can live queer lives with minimum amounts of disorientation related to our queerness. Ahmed highlights the need to allow queers to break with sexual inheritances as the major move towards less harm for queers. I highlight the need to create less harmful sexual inheritances, such that we would not need to break with them in order to live safe queer lives. Ahmed charts the promise of sexual disorientations through their capacity to help

queers break with inheritances. I chart the promise of disorientations in sexual contexts by showing how disorientations can help us transform sexual inheritances, drawing on my chapter five claims about what disorientations can do. Ahmed claims that queers are the relevant individuals to experience and benefit from sexual disorientations. I claim that queers and non-queers can both experience disorientations in ways which can reshape sexual contexts, and all of us can benefit from them. Sexual contexts are not the only areas where disorientations can be politically beneficial—I focus on them here because of my particular interest in sexual politics and because Ahmed’s project has cued the need to clarify the connection between disorientation and sexual justice.

I want to expand on Ahmed’s analysis of disorientation and heteronormativity in two directions: first, I situate nuanced examples of disorientations experienced in response to sexual experience or identification in my three-axis framework of the bodily, affective, and epistemological characteristics of disorientation. Doing so will support my claims in the next section about how disorientations in sexual contexts can be politically promising in helping us create better sexual inheritances. And second, I want to continue my interest in more than queer agents’ experiences of disorientation in heteronormative contexts: the disorientations of non-queers around sexual identity and action matter to my analysis. These involve, in part, non-queers’ disorientations in response to their own sexual identities (e.g., realizing that they are dynamic like queer identities; or potentially also harmed by heteronormativity), in response to others’ identities (e.g., their queer loved ones), and in response to recognitions of heteronorms at work in their communities. I am not only interested in the *sexual disorientations* Ahmed focuses on (i.e., where

queers do not know who their sexual objects are, or how to reach them from their positions within inherited heteronormativity), but also more broadly in disoriented experiences in contexts of socio-sexual action and identification (e.g., where a church must decide what to do when its priest comes out as gay).

Bodily aspects of disorientation in sexual contexts can be felt very clearly in disruptions of body habits, movements, and comportment. Queer individuals describe body unease in not knowing how to desire, move, touch, and style. Corporeal disorientations were described in chapter two mainly through the way they disrupted habits and regular practices of embodiment: trauma disrupted Brison's practiced ease by herself in the world, illness disrupted Servan-Schreiber's habitual interactions with other people and ways of moving in medical environments, and so on. Queer sexual identifications can disorient us when they disrupt the way we carry ourselves (e.g., disrupting how we walk or cross our legs), the way we touch other people (e.g., disrupting the way we reach for lovers' hands, disrupting how others let their children interact with us), the way we style our bodies (e.g., necklines, scents),¹¹² and the way we look at other bodies. Frank Browning describes the disorientation of his first queer recognition of another man, describing a day of work in his family's apple orchard when, as a twelve year old, he caught sight of the ankle of a nineteen-year old man, a "natural country athlete whose sweetness and seemingly unconscious virility disarmed everyone" (1993, 14). Browning notes that even though he was not yet aware of experiencing any sexual desire for the man, the aesthetic moment became "a kind of pornography, an image of [his] desire" (1993, 15). The image stayed with him, even in "a time and place

¹¹² See Kim Hall (2009) on queer breasted experience.

where the notion of growing up gay was simply unimaginable, not because it seemed bad or sick in the way homosexuals were seen to be bad, sick people, but because there was at large no model of what a gay life might be” (Browning 1993, 15). The visceral experience of desire is formative for Browning – disruptive and powerful. While queerness might lead us to be more disoriented than others about who our proper objects are, sexual desire in any case can be very disorienting: it can catch us off guard and make us uncomfortable. Like Heyes’ account of experiences of our bodies as both disruptive and exciting, sexual desire can make us feel awkward and unsettled, uneasy in bodily habits at the same time as we are interested in them. Queer or not, sexual desire can disorient our habitual embodiments: we can not know how to comport and move in given social situations because we literally cannot imagine what comes next (e.g., what do I do with this kind of body? How do I express desire here? What would be totally inappropriate?). Many disorientations in sexual contexts can stem in part from the comparable lack of social habit development: because we don’t see as many examples of daily, acceptable sexual interaction as we do, for example, of daily, acceptable interaction and communication in other domains, we may be justifiably likely to have a less established, more disruptable, less surefooted set of habits. Given how deeply desire affects us, and intersects with care on other levels for partners, we may want our habits to be disruptable. There can be significant awkwardness dealing with norms of sexuality as well – when we see norms openly thwarted or trespassed (e.g., when two men slow dance at a wedding), we can fail to know how to be comfortable, and all the more so if our expectations did not prepare us for the event, as they often do not for non-normative sexual practices.

We can see further how embodied habits might be disrupted for non-queer others just through the realization that queerness is possible: a hetero individual might have thought that certain kinds of bodies could be seen or touched without any sexual connotations (e.g., collective showering at the gym, touching teammates' bodies in sports), and that might shift when he realizes that queerness is possible (both in himself and others). Bodily disorientation in sexual contexts might introduce greater awareness of what he and others are feeling: he might be disrupted as he becomes more attentive to how queer others might feel about being touched by him; his movements might become softer or more hesitant as he notices the discomfort of his queer friends. As in all cases of disorientation, these will involve affective and epistemological disorientations as well.

Affective characteristics of disorientation are also evident in sexual contexts when individuals experience unclear or uncertain emotions, often multiple, confusing, and conflicted. I noted in chapter three the disorienting experience of not knowing what I am feeling, lacking a clear sense of how to feel or act on the basis of feeling; affective disorientations involve emotional indeterminacy, tension, and swell. We can see this in sexual contexts when individuals become unsure of how they should feel about their sexualities, about being queer, about their loved one's queerness, and so on. Individuals might struggle to determine what they are feeling about violence against queers, about openly queer politicians, or about affirmative action policies that promote hiring members of underrepresented sexual orientations. Seeing affective disorientations as often involving slippery or indeterminate emotions, we can see how affective

disorientations are involved in many sexual contexts (and not only queer ones): as queer, am I feeling in love or rebellious? Am I supportive of my child or angry that they would live out an orientation that puts them in danger? Am I feeling relieved or betrayed after my spouse comes out as gay? If I leave a hetero relationship to pursue a queer relationship, am I feeling true to myself or irresponsible? Affective disorientations in sexual contexts might be triggered by changes in spaces, as they were in cases of intense grief: we might feel tension between conflicting emotions in offices where we used to be able to tell gay jokes, homes where we never used to speak of sexual desire, hospitals where we could always assume each baby would have just one mother, or towns where we have never before spoken of the need for subsidized queer teen housing. Emotional swell might be particularly noticeable in disorientations within sexual contexts—perhaps because the way I used to desire was steadier or the way I used to imagine my nephew’s future more straightforward. Perhaps when I think about my church after coming out I have floods of worry about what people must be saying. Or perhaps my thoughts about marriage laws used to be emotionally detached, but now (as queer or not) I have vibrant feelings of excitement, anger, urgency, and care for all states to make same-sex marriage possible. Passion for queer politics, often involving affective swell, can be fuelled by both sensed injustice and felt desire.

Epistemological aspects of disorientation can be noticed in contexts of sexual identification and action when, for example, individuals experience disruptions in what they know (or think they can know) about their own and others’ sexualities and about how to evaluate them morally. Sexualities can involve disruption or changes in how we

understand our desires, especially regarding the kinds of others we find ourselves desiring, patterns of desire, and corresponding sexual identifications over time. Nalo Hopkinson provides a tangible description:

I tend to act first through a trepidation that gongs so loudly I have a hard time hearing whether it's masking any desire. I figure out the desire part in the moment or later, if at all. Form following function. Identity following action. Or something like that, only messier. If the popular narrative of knowing one's sexuality before experiencing it is the only way to be, I don't have an orientation. I have a dis-orientation. (Hopkinson 2007, 22)

Like Du Bois and Fanon, queers might experience forms of disorientation through feelings of doubleness: a tension between who I want to be (e.g., a supported gay man at the funeral) and who I am allowed to be (e.g., either an unsupported single man or a selfish, flaunting gay man). Such forms of disorientation can be further complicated by the sometimes available possibilities of passing as non-queer. We can imagine how epistemological disorientations might be prompted by my coming to have a sense of not knowing how my identity will develop, or how to determine evaluation of the rightness of non-normative sexualities if I have for a long time been trained to think of heterosexuality as the best option. I might experience epistemological disorientations when I struggle to understand my own desires, my brother's seeming choice to risk being gay, or how well-meaning teachers might be making it harder for kids to be openly queer.

Self-doubt can be an important characteristic of experiences in sexual contexts: I might doubt myself as queer, as non-queer, as someone doing my best to support a queer

loved one, or as someone who has participated in my community's heteronorms without ever meaning harm. We have seen how disorientation might be further triggered in response to challenging new situations, and there can be multiple new kinds of deliberative challenges involved in sexual contexts: new challenges as queer (e.g., Should I come out to my boss? As a gay man, do I insist on bringing my boyfriend to a family funeral – I could use the support, but I don't want to make this all about me); new challenges in response to queer loved ones (e.g., Do I ask about my son's dating life or not? Do I still share a bed with my lesbian best friend when we go out of town? Is it still okay to put a gay male phys-ed teacher in the boys' change room?); and new challenges when we come to recognize heteronormative inheritances at work in our communities (e.g., If our mayor has done great things for women and children, but openly condemned queers, what do we do during the next election? When I meet with a principal who says my gay son shouldn't act as he does if he doesn't want to be bullied, how should I respond? When I recognize that my queer patient's partner will not be secured visitation after her surgery, what should I do?).

Education in sexual contexts can prompt epistemological disorientations at multiple levels as well: the education we receive or find we need around questions of heteronormativity and sexual identity can be very disorienting. Even if I think I know that heteronormativity is bad, I might not know how to recognize it; if I know how to recognize it, I might not know how to change how I act; if I know how to change how I act, I might not know how to change the environment which makes it hard to act anti-heteronormatively. Epistemological disorientations can express strangely, as discussed in

chapter four, sometimes through a felt need to return to the basics of what we do know: faced with my grandchild's queerness, I may revert to my childhood beliefs about queerness being sinful. Or I may say to him, 'I will love you unconditionally,' without knowing if that might mean thinking or acting differently. The incessant self-criticism of self-doubt can be a major part of disorientations in sexual contexts, as when queers are torn between acting on queer desire and continuing to think it disgusting. It seems that complex bodily, affective, and cognitive disorientations are sometimes collected, along with other phenomena, under the framework of 'internalized homophobia'. I have a clear sense of my own limits of knowledge as queer when I realize that I do not only lack full understanding of the support I might benefit from, but I also lack knowledge of how to support other queer individuals, particularly those in very different positions than me by virtue of class, race, geography, and age.

Sexual action is often disorienting, and all the more so the more individuals confront struggles to reconcile their desires or the desires of others with limiting norms. Cases where individuals confront the way harmful sexual norms play out within their communities further highlight experiences of disorientation on all these levels. Individuals can be disoriented by recognitions of heteronormative harms within their communities in a variety of ways, ranging from more minor harms to more major ones. We see major movements to raise awareness of heteronorms in the history of gay and lesbian activism: at Stonewall, in the election of Harvey Milk, and in the Prop 8 fight for state-recognized same-sex marriage rights in California. These and other efforts surely involved major successes, major harms, and major disorientations as individuals

(participants, observers, and objectors) experienced startling accomplishments, troubling hypocrisies, and disillusionments.

I want to focus on anti-queer violence as a particular kind of phenomenon that brings harms of heteronorms to individuals' understanding and that has prompted morally significant experiences of disorientation: anti-queer violence against young people in communities. Anti-queer violence is not rare, and its effects can be devastating. In order to highlight both disorientations (this section) and their moral significance (next section), I focus on the anti-queer hate crime against Matthew Shepard in 1998—though many other cases could demonstrate the same.

On October 6, 1998, Matthew Shepard, a young, male, gay university student was brutally beaten and eventually died in Laramie, Wyoming, as the result of a hate crime committed against him by two young men from his own community. Although representations of what brought about and followed from Shepard's death do not always align (e.g., there are people who still do not think of the murder as an anti-gay hate crime), I want to focus on the way accounts emphasize both how individuals were disoriented by Shepard's death, and how broader communities were forced to confront their shared sexual norms as a result. Queer people were not the only ones unsettled by Shepard's death: besides Shepard's friends, family, teachers, and acquaintances, members of the community in Laramie who knew, educated, and raised the two men responsible for his death were disrupted and in some cases distraught.

There have been numerous, varied, partial responses to Shepard's death—in mainstream news coverage, television documentaries, and *The meaning of Matthew*, the recently published memoir from Matthew's mother Judy Shepard. The recreation of sexual inheritances is compellingly depicted in Moisés Kaufman's 2002 film *The Laramie project*. The film follows members of a New York theatre company who travel to Laramie to interview its residents in order to write and perform a play based on the events, and draws from transcripts of 200 interviews with members of the community. The disorienting impact of the crime and of Matthew's death on the community is emphasized throughout the film, as the life of the town is disrupted by an onslaught of media attention and disturbed by the knowledge of the identities of the perpetrators, Laramie residents themselves. Members of the community are depicted as unsettled by their realization of the immediacy of the crime and by the need to re-investigate Laramie compelled by it. In the film, a detective reports that investigations of the crime uncovered what had until then been a largely invisible gay community in Laramie. A doctor admits, "I guess I didn't understand the magnitude with which some people hate" (*The Laramie Project*). The film shows members of the community realizing that responsibility for the crime does not belong solely to the two individuals who committed it, but to all those who interacted with them, developed patterns of relating, and established norms of expectation. The greatest disorientations seem to come in part from realizing these direct and indirect responsibilities for Matthew's death. As one shop owner says of those who committed the crime, "My secret hope was that they were from somewhere else. Then you can create this distance. 'We don't grow children like that here.' Well, it's pretty clear we do grow children like that here" (*The Laramie Project*).

We can see various levels of disorientation experienced by individuals in this context: individuals in Laramie became disoriented by the event of Shepard's assault upon discovering that they lived in such hateful communities. Shepard's family becomes disoriented on levels of body, affect, and cognition. As Judy Shepard writes:

Everything I'd done in my life since marrying Dennis was with my family foremost in mind. Now, for the first time, it seemed like there was nothing I could do to protect anybody, including myself. Even worse, our tragedy was about to unfold under the scrutiny of TV cameras and reporters' notebooks. The feeling of helplessness morphed into a wave of nausea that forced me to rush to a [bathroom] stall and throw up...I wanted to bawl and fall to my knees when the doctors finally briefed us on the full extent of Matt's condition. (Shepard 2009, 100, 103)

As she describes Matthew's brother's experience upon hearing how serious Shepard's condition was:

I think I can best describe what it was like for Logan by comparing it to most people's experience when they first heard that two planes had crashed into the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11...Until we saw what had happened with our own eyes—and in many cases, not for hours or days afterward—we couldn't understand the gravity of what had really happened because we had no experience with which to compare it. (Shepard 2009, 96)

One of the major sets of feelings to accompany disorientation is powerlessness. Judy Shepard writes, "The night before the memorial service, I sat in my hotel room, wondering: How had my family's life come to this? Why was our son's picture in

newspapers and one newscasts nationwide? How has our private suffering become such public spectacle? Why was my husband preparing to wear a bulletproof vest?” (Shepard 2009, 178). When individuals in Laramie learned that they were mistaken about the world in some important ways, for example in their belief that their community was safe for everyone, welcoming of diversity, or aware of its own prejudices, experiences of doubt (of both self and community) seem to have been triggered: what are we supposed to do now? What could we possibly do? How can we support Matthew’s family who are not from here? How can we begin to make this right? What is everyone else thinking? How can we all communicate? A cousin of Shepard’s gave a homily at his funeral: “This is not the way it is supposed to be. A son has died, a brother has been lost, a child has been broken, torn, abandoned. We become engulfed in a turbulent stream of grief, anger, guilt, fear, shame, outrage” (Shepard 2009, 184). As we have seen, disorientations can both result from sudden attention (e.g., such massive media attention in Laramie) and can draw others’ attention to us, as a result of the way disorientations make it harder for us to move smoothly or pass unseen. When residents of Laramie realized that a young man died as a result of harmful norms that had gone undiscussed in their community, many became disoriented.

3. Disorientations And Political Change

A) Queer Contingency And Breaking With Genealogy

Sexual disorientations can be differently motivated and variously experienced.

According to Ahmed, living queer lives requires resisting and refusing inheritances in particular ways. Given that genealogies structure what sexual norms we inherit, and genealogies are predominantly drawn through hetero-family lines of straight parents having straight children who they expect will reproduce more children, Ahmed claims that “a shift in sexual orientation is not liveable simply as a continuation of an old line” (2006b, 102). Family lines, on Ahmed’s view, are heterosexual, and queer people cannot successfully take up such lines; the task for queers “is to trace the lines for a different genealogy, one that would embrace the failure to inherit the family line as the condition of possibility for another way of dwelling in the world... [For] to inherit the past in this world for queers would be to inherit one’s own disappearance” (2006b, 178). Insofar as inheritance is associated with an anti-queer past, itself a major threat to queer lives, survival depends on failing to inherit familial lines. As Ahmed explains, “Queer genealogy would not be about making another family tree, which would turn queer connections into new lines, nor would it be about creating a line that connects two sides. A queer genealogy would take the very ‘affects’ of mixing, or coming into contact with things that reside on different lines, as opening up new kinds of connection” (2006b, 154-155). Ahmed’s position seems to be threefold: a queer genealogy will only be helpful if it: a) does not continue old lines; b) embraces the failure to inherit family lines; and c) resists formulating an alternative family tree. Sexual disorientation, in the sense Ahmed associates with individual queers, allows for the appearance of objects, actions and inclinations which are otherwise invisible. Sexual disorientation can bring possibilities for queer (and other non-normative) orientations within reach, both by making us more

able to notice and desire them, and often by re-situating us in queer communities that are capable of responding to our needs for support in pursuing them. “Queer feelings may embrace a sense of discomfort, a lack of ease with the available scripts for living and loving, along with an excitement in the face of the uncertainty of where the discomfort might take us...Discomfort, in other words, allows things to move” (Ahmed 2004, 155; 2006b, 154). Given its potential to benefit individuals and our possibilities for less restrictive sexual identification and action, possibilities of such disorientations should be continually available to us — sexual disorientation should not be viewed as ideally avoidable or eliminable.

For Ahmed, what motivates and allows for disorienting refusals of compulsory orientations is newly directed desire – contact with new kinds of sexual others, and the felt development of attraction. Ahmed clarifies ‘contact’ by reintroducing the history of the word, drawing connection between *contingent* (as tenuous) and *contact* (as embodied). “The word ‘contingency’ has the same root in Latin as the word ‘contact’ (Latin: *contingere*: *com*, with; *tangere*, to touch). Contingency is linked in this way to the sociality of being ‘with’ others, of getting close enough to touch” (Ahmed, 2004, 28). The contingency of queer desire is thus both its fleshiness and its fragility.

Queer pleasures put bodies into contact that have been kept apart by the scripts of compulsory heterosexuality...When bodies touch and give pleasure to bodies that have been barred from contact, then those bodies are reshaped. The hope of queer is that the reshaping of bodies through the enjoyment of what or who has been barred can ‘impress’ differently upon the surfaces of social space, creating the

possibility of social forms that are not constrained by the form of the heterosexual couple. (Ahmed, 2004, 165)

Queer sexual disorientations are perhaps most often motivated by some combination of new desire and dis-identification with old desires, or the desires others assume we have. Sexual disorientations, in this sense, can make queer sexual orientations more possible for individuals. On Ahmed's view, queer desire makes possible new ways of being oriented, new ways of resisting compulsory orientations, new ways of bringing objects into reach. As she puts it, "The contingency of lesbian desire makes things happen" (2006b, 107). Ahmed helps make tangible the power of queer contact for making queer lives more accessible.

Ahmed's analysis of queer desire's motivational force is corrective to a tradition of lesbian autobiography which too often de-emphasizes the role of queer desire in the formation of lesbian lives. Reading Ahmed as partly in the lineage of Minnie Bruce Pratt, Bidy Martin, and Cheshire Calhoun, we can see how Ahmed's project of re-emphasizing fleshed out desire is one these earlier accounts show is needed. In the same text discussed in chapter three, Pratt discusses how she came to enact queerness while also taking up feminist, anti-racist, anti-oppressive practices. Articulating the central questions of her piece, Pratt asks, "how do we begin to change, and then keep going, and act on this in the world? How do we *want* to be different from what we have been?" (1984, 19). Although Pratt highlights the pull toward other women as partial motivation for her reorientation and new political positioning, she describes the shift in more deliberative, less embodied terms than Ahmed would — Pratt is more interested in love

for women in general, less interested in queer desire. The need for a more fleshed out discussion of desire is highlighted by Martin's response to Pratt and others, "Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference[s]" (1993) and Calhoun's *Feminism, the Family, and the Politics of the Closet* (2000). As Martin criticizes one pattern of lesbian autobiography:

Many of the coming-out stories are tautological insofar as they describe a process of coming to know something that has always been true, a truth to which the author has returned. They also describe a linear progression from a past shrouded in confusion or lies to a present or future that represents a liberation from the past. Coming out is conceived, then, as both a return to one's true self and desire and a movement beyond distortion and constraint, grounding identity and political unity in moral right and truth. (1993, 281)

Following Martin, Calhoun calls for a re-sexualized conception of lesbianism and a more richly differentiated language of queer desire (2000, 53). Ahmed's queer phenomenology takes up the question of Pratt's narrative – 'How do we begin to change?' – develops Martin's critique of over-simplified coming out stories, and responds to Calhoun's call for a more differentiated language of desire. Her account does so by foregrounding embodied queer desire and the importance of *contact*. Ahmed's account of queer draws attention to what and how queer is: crucially and vitally offline, oblique, not subsumable under hetero-desire. As she puts it, "We know that (luckily) compulsory heterosexuality doesn't always work...at certain points we can refuse the inheritance" (2006, 94, 90).

Ahmed positions the sexual disorientations individual queers experience as part of what can propel them into new ways of being in touch, new ways of refusing heterosexist inheritances, and the main kind of disorientation that can transform queer lives. Much of Ahmed's account is instructive: it is true, for example, that queers can sometimes need to distance ourselves from our communities in order to survive. Part of my claim to the ways disorientations can prompt better relational structures was that sometimes better relational structures require that we distance ourselves from parts of our communities. It is also true that individual queer's disorientations can be good for queer lives: they can prompt increased sensitivity to our own embodied and affective experience by putting us more in touch with queerness, sometimes making more queer contact seem possible and attractive, often showing us that our desires are worth working and risking for. Queers' disorientations can result in usefully unsettling the expectations of others by challenging their conceptions of sexual normalcy, of sexual orientations as static or fixed, and so on—our disorientations can be disorienting to those around us.

Having said this, my interest is in pushing into a broader analysis of how disorientations can help queer and non-queer individuals change heterosexist inheritances themselves. Sexual inheritances can be rebuilt not only by queer others, sexual contact is not the only contingency to put us in touch with queer possibilities, and sexual disorientation is not the only kind of disorientation that can transform the heteronormative world. And although we can distance ourselves to some extent from heterosexist communities, we cannot ever distance ourselves from inheritances, and very often cannot distance ourselves from families, communities, or towns wholly or

permanently. I am not claiming that individual queers bear the responsibility to stay in dangerous places and change communities that hate them. Rather, queers and non-queers need to create less dangerous places and less hateful communities, with an urgency informed by the reality of how rarely queers can actually leave their home communities and a tentativeness motivated by a clear sense of the limits of better options elsewhere. Social connectionist and forward-looking models of responsibility may be the best structures to support this project.

Ahmed's view of sexual inheritances as working only to prevent rather than allow for queer orientations stems in part from a mistakenly individualistic understanding of the origins of queer desire. Recall my claim in the last section that all desire is, in part, socially generated. Ahmed insufficiently accounts for the roles social inheritances can and do play in allowing for queer desire. Even though we still too commonly inherit compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormativity is not built into the structure of all sexual inheritance. If we fail to show that queer desire can be positively allowed for in part by our families, hometowns, exposures to media, and so on, we risk problematically isolating queerness from social situations. We can see this problem both in Ahmed's distancing of queer desire from social constitution, and in her distancing of queer orientations from social inheritances. While Ahmed's emphasis on queer contact helps us better interpret Pratt's and others' accounts of the pull of queer objects, we still need also to consider further the social circumstances that push us (sometimes kindly, sometimes forcefully) to pursue the pull. The insufficient sense of social contributions to

bringing queerness into reach is evident, for example, when Pratt highlights the experience of becoming queer as a kind of ‘jumping’:

Sometimes folks ask how I got started, and I must admit that I did not begin by reasoning out the gains...I began when I jumped from my edge and outside myself, into radical change, for love: simply love: for myself and for other women. I acted on that love by becoming a lesbian, falling in love with and becoming sexual with a particular woman; and this love led me directly, but by a complicated way, to work against racism and anti-Semitism. (1984, 19)

Neither the pull of desire nor the potentially positive push of inheritance is adequately discussed by Pratt — she gives no social context to her ‘jump’; not where she was jumping from, how she got up there, who might be jumping with her, or what she might hope to land on.

Ahmed does note that queer refusals of familial inheritances do not leave us completely without structure: “The failure of inheritance does not mean that we have nothing to follow, but rather it can open up worlds by providing a different angle on ‘what’ is inherited” (2006b, 144). We need to note, though, that this says nothing about changing inheritances so much as changing how we as queers view them, and thereby changing how much power they have to harm us. Contra Ahmed, I mean to defend the importance of recognizing and creating non-repressive inheritances and family lines, and to highlight a broader vision of disorientations as having the power to help us do so. Building on my expanded analysis of disorientations in socio-sexual contexts—lots of people become disoriented in these contexts in politically relevant ways, and not only

when they are struggling to live out non-normative sexualities—I want to suggest that some effects of disorientation can be politically productive, fostering communities in which being queer need not always mean breaking with our familial lines and social inheritances—as though we ever meaningfully could.

B) Transforming Inheritances

Creating communities which are less dangerous for queer individuals now and in the future requires creating less heteronormative sexual inheritances. I have claimed that a less heteronormative sexual context benefits everyone, at the same time as it will compromise some of the ways straight individuals have benefitted from heterosexism. To be clear, the historical demand for better gay rights and safer spaces for queers would require moral action even if heteronormativity did not harm non-queers. I am not interested in a view of anti-heteronormative action motivated only by a new realization that because heteronormativity is bad for *everyone*, everyone should now act to stop it. Yet the fullest picture of the harms of heteronormativity does not stop at queers being harmed and straights being benefitted, but rather involves complex ways in which queers are harmed, straights are harmed, some straights more than others benefit, and some queers more than others can also benefit (e.g., queers with other degrees of privilege, who can be the first to serve as ‘token gay’ in positions of power). Given that being a member of a community means not only that I can be affected by inheritances, but also that they can be affected by me, my suggestion requires theorizing how queer and non-queer

individuals can change the direction and force of inheritances by the ways we exist within them.¹¹³

My earlier point about disorientations having potentially beneficial effects both within and outside of the context of whatever triggered them is important here: disorientations triggered by socio-sexual contexts can have politically beneficial effects *within* those contexts (e.g., as in the case of individuals in Laramie being disoriented by Shepard's death and working to create a less anti-gay community), as well as elsewhere (e.g., the same disorientations creating senses of urgency to work against harms felt by other outsiders and immigrants in the community). Likewise, disorientations not prompted by socio-sexual inheritances can have beneficial effects in helping work for more just sexual inheritances. I focus here on cases where the disorientations triggered in socio-sexual contexts have the effects which prompt action toward less heteronormative inheritances (e.g., being disoriented when my child tells me he is queer prompts me to become better at anticipating the needs of queer patients in my medical practice), but contexts of disorientations and contexts of politically salient effects need not always align. Even though we still too commonly inherit compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormativity is not built into the structure of all familial inheritances. Family lines can be queered by the identities or commitments of the people within them. And bio-

¹¹³ The following text from a widely circulated poster (from Portland, Oregon in 2004) associates the need to practice queerness closely with the need to take responsibilities for creating better sexual inheritances more closely than I have, but also gets at issues of shared responsibility in compelling ways. "There are no queer teen suicides, only queer teen murders. Anyone who espouses anti-gay rhetoric, anyone who says it's unnatural to love someone of the same sex, anyone who calls someone a faggot or a dyke maliciously, anyone who does not challenge heterosexuality as a cultural norm, is implicated in the deaths of queer teenagers who take their own lives...When we don't challenge exclusionary sex education lessons, when we don't cross dress, when we don't act on our sexual desires and curiosities, when we are ignorant about intersexuality and transgenderism, we are braiding the nooses upon which queer teens hang."

familial lines, whether heteronormative or not, are not the only source of our sexual inheritances. The inheritances that give direction to our lives are not restricted to what our families show and tell us. A broader conception of social inheritance — in every case involving impure communities (Lugones 2002) and politically conflicted histories — makes sense of how even familial inheritances are not closed systems. I am suggesting we can apply Ahmed’s queer politics to revising rather than refusing the directions of our inheritances – an argument I hope will be relevant to ethicists and anti-oppression political theorists alike. While we might experience queerness as a resistance to our inheritances, queer desire does not and cannot separate us from them.

i) Disorientations Can Motivate Less Arrogant, Less Rigid, More Tentative

Identification And Action

Less rigid, more tentative patterns of identification and action can be generated in socio-sexual contexts when the rigidity of sexual identifications is called into question, and when questions of which sexualities are ‘natural’ or ‘right’ become complicated. As in the case of sexual dynamism explored above, coming to see our own sexualities as dynamic can be disorienting at the same time as it loosens rigid holds on senses we have had of the obviousness of how we should identify and act. Such loosened holds on identification and action can be morally relevant when more rigid holds are morally troubling – as they are in many cases of rigidly holding to the religious, natural, or social superiority of being straight.¹¹⁴ Significant experiences of insecurity and uncertainty can

¹¹⁴ Increased senses of my own sexuality as potentially dynamic can also have the opposite, morally troubling effect of tightening my grip, as in cases where expressed homophobia worsens when a family

follow from the disorientations of sexual contexts described above: if we find that we were wrong about the open-mindedness of our community or about the love-lives of our loved ones, we might develop more humility around what we think we can know. I am interested in how experiences of disorientation can help generate less arrogant queer politics, with more awareness of historical patterns of exclusion (e.g., of people who were not queer enough, of trans people), and with more openness to solidarity with other anti-oppression activists (e.g., fights for particular religious rights). Ladelle McWhorter describes her own experience of disorientation following Shepard's assault, triggered by the need to respond to the event in the context of other injustices:

Like most queer Americans and many non-queer ones as well, I followed the grim news regarding Shepard's condition and prognosis closely, day by day, for nearly a week...In the thirty-six hours or so following Shepard's death, a few Penn State students managed to put together plans for a candlelight vigil...There were about thirty people in all. Most of them, like most of the population of State College, Pennsylvania, were white and very young. To my eye they all looked pale, scared, and vulnerable...The rain came down a little harder. I looked around at those assembled. It was a miserable gathering, pathetic, hardly a show of community and strength in the face of adversity...A rippled murmur spread through the crowd. 'Does anybody know the words to We Shall Overcome? Can somebody start it?'...I could have started the song, and then maybe through their unified voices, for just a few minutes, that frightened, wet, dejected little knot of people would have become something like a community united and supporting each other in a time of

member comes out of the closet – but, like the risks of disorientations in self-doubt and trauma, this kind of response has been documented before. My focus is on the less documented positive effects of disorientations.

crisis...As I drove through the profound rural darkness back to the solitude of my rented farmhouse with tears running down my cheeks, I asked myself: Why did I not do it?...I could not bring myself to take a song that to me meant hope in the face of white racism and use it to express hope in the face of heterosexist violence.

(McWhorter 2009, 2, 4-6)

It is not clear what queer politics should look like in all cases (e.g., on contentious questions of marriage), particularly in the context of other oppressions (e.g., racism), and anti-heteronormative political solidarities are fragile. Less arrogant queer politics may be generated in part by recent moves to secure queer elders meetings and to establish ways for queer youth organizations to be better in touch with queer elders. Sharing concerns and highlighting ongoing questions might allow older queers to continue to create better sexual inheritances, and to help prevent new anti-heteronormative political movements from perpetuating past mistakes (e.g., of exclusion). In *The Laramie Project*, Laramie residents are depicted as taking up less arrogant, more tentative action when a priest suggests that those who assaulted Matthew be asked and enabled to recreate inheritances by teaching the townspeople what to do differently in the future. Recall Young's point in the last chapter, that acting responsibly in forward-looking ways requires recognizing that we act always under socio-historical constraints – such recognitions can be humbling. Our conditions of action are the result of previous actions, and our actions can have future effects which extend beyond our intentions. More tentative identification and action can help create better sexual inheritances by creating more room for changing identities, and by fostering more diverse queer communities, open to change.

ii) Disorientations Can Motivate Sensitivity To Embodied And Affective Experiences

More sensitivity to the embodied and affective experiences of ourselves and others can be generated in socio-sexual contexts when we are confronted with questions of sexual action and identification in new places (e.g., neighbourhoods, classrooms, bookstores), by new questions (e.g., questionnaires that aim to test sexual biases, the curiosities of children), or by new offers (e.g., sexual offers from friends of our own gender might prompt reconsiderations of what we have thought to be our obvious heterosexual orientations). There is something crucial about the ways disorientations in socio-sexual contexts can foster *new ways of being in touch with each other*. Ahmed is interested in the potential of desirous contact to help queer individuals break with inheritances. I am interested in the potential of non-desirous as well as desirous contact to help all agents create better sexual inheritances. Being in touch with each other in less heteronormative ways can help reshape sexual inheritances in part by making us more sensitive to each other's embodied and affective needs. Increased sensitivity is generated when individuals come to notice the needs of queer others when they first gain access to conversations with us, such that they feel able to ask open but respectful questions. Residents of Laramie are depicted as having gained new understandings of the needs of queer individuals within their community when the 'Live and let live' motto of Laramie, cited by various people interviewed, is brought to light as having functioned to affirm mainstream lifestyles while silencing deviant ones. They have gained sensitivity to the

actual experience of queer people in Laramie, moving past the rhetoric of equality that overrides bodily and emotional needs. More sensitivity to the embodied and affective needs of queer individuals could also produce the creation of better inheritances within specific parts of sexual communities – safer sex among teenagers, more open sexual conversation within families and churches, better communication of sexual desire and disability. Increased sensitivity to vulnerable bodily and affective experiences can make for less heteronormative sexual inheritances by improving the senses individuals have of what kind of care is needed, and can combine with motivational developments to make it more likely that sexual agents will be better cared for.

iii) Disorientations Can Equip Us To Notice Unexpected, Complicated, And Urgent Calls To Action

We can become more able to notice calls to action towards sexual justice in socio-sexual contexts when disorientations bring new aspects of heteronormativity to our attention, or new aspects of what we can do to work against it. We might not know what we are called to do in cases of sexual injustice because of what we stand to lose by acting, because they have never seemed relevant to our lives before, or because we were not aware that there were any unjust norms at work. We might be aware that urgent action is needed, as in the case of Laramie, without knowing exactly what our community should do or what role we have to play as individuals. Disorientations can prompt shifts in ways we find ourselves called to act, as seen in individuals becoming new members of PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and in community responses to

anti-gay politics, such as the ones documented in the 1995 film *Ballot Measure 9*, which portrays a surprisingly diverse community's fight against an anti-gay amendment proposed by the Oregon Citizens Alliance. The more we begin to notice unexpected calls to action, the more we may be able to do so in the future: non-heteronormative inheritances are made more possible when we write and read books about families that do not revolve around or require heterosexual cores, support queer media, insist on queer-friendly homes, rental properties, offices, and classrooms, pay careful attention to what kind of sexual possibilities we describe to friends, colleagues, students, readers, and children in everyday conversations, make sure that queer partners are publically acknowledged in obituaries, and so on. Becoming better able to notice urgent calls to various kinds of action where we did not notice them before can help us create better sexual inheritances by making sure the real and complex harms of heteronormativity are more likely to be attended to than eclipsed.

iv) Disorientations Can Highlight Power Structures

We can become more aware of power structures in socio-sexual contexts when we see how disorientations can shift individuals' positions within them (e.g., from the respected straight boss to the less-respected queer boss; from the good parents of a teenager to the bad parents of a teenage bully/murderer). Power structures that we had until now fit smoothly into can become threats to us, or ones that were disempowering to us can become liveable. Insofar as experiences of disorientation can shift our positions of power (and, in the other direction, shifts in positions of power can be very disorienting), we can

become more aware of structures of power at work in socio-sexual contexts. Such awareness can be politically beneficial for the ways they unsettle deeply held senses of our own legitimacy as falsely independent of the marginalization of others. That is, those with dominant sexual identities can mistakenly understand their straightness as just easy, neglecting the ways in which their ease depends on their contrast with uneasy queers: their sexualities are normalized against queer sexualities which are villainized. As in the case of settlers who fail to notice the ways in which all their ease relies on unjust structures of domination, a shift to politically adequate action can require, in Paulette Regan's terms, "unsettling the settler within."¹¹⁵ When, as a result of disorientations, individuals become more aware of the power structures which sustain their sexual privilege, better sexual inheritances can be created: sometimes by disrupting the felt entitlement that produces narrow minded social politics (e.g., of relatively privileged queer individuals whose fight for marriage rights might eclipse necessary fights for poorer queers' access to employment and housing), sometimes by allowing less heteronormative identities more access to structural power (e.g., in education, politics, medicine, law), and sometimes by making possible dialogue between individuals in different positions of power.

Following Shepard's death, some residents of Laramie are shown as taking up responsibilities as shared when a Catholic priest and gay members of the theatre company build unlikely solidarities, working toward joint projects of supporting Matthew's family and friends and facilitating a community conversation about the town's norms. Judy Shepard describes the 'Angel Action' group formed by Matthew's friend Romaine

¹¹⁵ See Regan 2010.

Patterson and others in response to Fred Phelps, leader of an anti-gay group from Westboro Baptist Church who would disrupt gatherings meant to honour Shepard with signs saying “God hates Fags” and “Matthew in Hell”: “Their work has inspired thousands of other people around the country, who download the do-it-yourself angel kit online and launch their own Angel Action whenever the Phelps clan comes to town” (Shepard 2009, 205). Returning to the social connectionist accounts discussed in chapter five, these new allegiances embody Young’s suggestion that we can practice forward-looking responsibility by generating dialogue between agents in different positions of power and establishing cooperative trust between members of historically advantaged and disadvantaged groups (2006, 129-130). Such solidarities allow specifically for embodying responsibility by recognizing and supporting the limitedness of individuals. The film depicts members of the community as acting responsibly in new ways by showing powerful people and institutions interacting in new ways after Matthew’s assault; Laramie’s Catholic church, university professors, doctors, and police officers are shown as developing new patterns of mutual interaction and support.

v) Disorientations Can Highlight The Contingency Of Norms

Realizations that heteronorms are contingent rather than necessary parts of our communities are integral parts of anti-heteronormative politics. We regularly come to realize the contingency of heteronorms in periods of disorientation, when norms and their applications are sometimes made contestable (e.g., by residents’ realization that heteronorms at work in Laramie were no longer acceptable) and the spaces which have

been governed by them are challenged and reworked. Ahmed seems to position the norms of sexual inheritances as relatively stable, but we see in the case of Laramie, and increasingly in Canadian public discourse around education, law, and human rights that heteronorms are contingent and contestable. Heteronorms are recognized and contested in Laramie in tangible ways that have to do in part with the reclaiming of institutions and spaces. Particularly physical spaces that have rich social memories attached to them (e.g., churches, schools, hospitals, courtrooms, family homes, social venues) can be important sites of disorientation: as individuals struggle to take up better norms within such spaces (e.g., acknowledging new forms of marriage within churches, desegregating schools along gender or racial lines, making queer dance clubs more accessible to wheelchairs, welcoming various parental structures in birthing rooms), we can experience deep-seated conflict (e.g., McWhorter 1999, 168-175 on the disorientation of learning to line dance as queer in Richmond, Virginia). In an article in the *New York Times*, James Brooke describes how a University of Wyoming homecoming parade shows how some residents challenge the view that only a minority of people in Laramie share queer political concerns: “On Saturday, at the University of Wyoming's annual homecoming parade, ‘Pistol Pete’ and his uniformed brass band were overshadowed by the largest group of marchers: 450 people, many wearing yellow armbands and carrying signs in support of the student, Matthew Shepard, 21, who suffered severe head injuries in the attack last week” (*New York Times*, October 12 1998). Members of the community use the parade to challenge the view that only a minority of people in Laramie share queer political concerns. The effort to contest norms takes form through a reclaiming of space. Shifts in spaces can allow for contesting norms in other ways as well: when a woman in a

wheelchair enters a gay bar, assumed norms of embodiment and sexiness can shift. The contingency of norms also shifts individual action, as when Judy Shepard discusses her own disorientation, how she came to understand sexual norms at work in her own behaviour differently, to be able to better identify homophobic behaviour (e.g., parenting practices) after her son's death. Following Shepard's death, new patterns of interaction about queerness emerge in Wyoming and elsewhere, involving new solidarities between formerly adverse groups, towards explicitly reconceiving sexual norms and protections.¹¹⁶ Recognizing the contingency of norms can allow for changing sexual inheritances because contingent norms are more open to challenge than those which appear absolute. But it is clear that recognizing contingent norms is not equivalent to having created better norms – so this effect is morally relevant but not sufficient to ensure more just inheritances.

vi) Disorientations Can Motivate Better Relational Involvements

Better relational involvements can be motivated by disorientations in socio-sexual contexts when we become compelled to change our heteronormative communities. Improved relational involvements are one of the most direct ways in which sexual inheritances change. Although it is clear that desirous queer sexual contact can change the way we conceive of our sexual possibilities, I want to consider how contact between non-queer, non-desiring bodies can also reshape social space. By contact, I mean both

¹¹⁶ Even so, disorientation in one area of understanding or practice does not magically highlight all of our complicity in oppression, nor could it ever be a panacean corrective—as evidenced by Judy Shepard's persistent classism and homogenizing reading of “folks like McKinney” (2009, 144), the ‘high-school dropout’ who was charged with felony murder and second-degree murder.

new practices of coming into contact—new ways of getting in touch, new combinations of diverse groups and individuals coming into conversation—as well as new patterns of social interaction—new expectations of who will be in touch, in what contexts, and how. Non-repressive sexual inheritances can be spurred by the formation of new relationships with friends, siblings, parents, children, and others who are regularly harmed by social interactions that devalue their queer sexualities. We also make queer possibilities more accessible simply by allowing those around us to be publically queer. Browning’s claim that forcing queer lives into privacy lets queer people offer “no model, no quarter, no inspiration, to others—child or adult—who would explore all that is queer about themselves” (1993, 18) points to the promise of the opposite: protecting the public positions of queer lives can offer an inspiration to others.

We can see how norms are physically expressed and enforced when we consider what kinds of sexual partners are most easily embraced, fed, or hosted by families, or what kinds of sexual selves are most readily protected, punished, or imprisoned by governments. The restrictions that make it dangerous to be publically queer in movie theatres, emergency shelters, subways, and so on, are serious harms that prevent many of us from living out our sexual selfhood. Making queer orientations more possible can involve creating new ways of being in touch: physically and emotionally supporting queer others, committing to building or spending time in queer-affirming places, training ourselves to see how anti-queer prejudices show up in our body movements or expressions, discouraging heteronormative habits, and so on. Desire can still be part of this broader sense of contact: I can be sensuously attracted to queer lives before I consider enacting one myself, not because I sexually desire the queer individuals

involved, but perhaps because I find some shifts in norms, more explicitly acknowledged dynamisms of desire, or queer community involvement attractive or pleasurable. Some lesbian and gay residents of Laramie are depicted as creating new relational networks for queers when they courageously come out of the closet following Shepard's death and work to establish a more explicit queer community.¹¹⁷ By demanding acknowledgment as valuable members of the community, these people are uniquely able to confront the community's heteronormative biases and to rework patterns of education.

Returning to Browning, we notice how his descriptions of what allowed for his queer contact are framed in stories of his efforts to recognize himself in his community. Only in dialogue with his community, and only as triggered by the images and memories it provided him, did Browning begin to notice himself reaching in queer directions. Queer desire is in this sense allowed for in indirect, resistance-oriented ways when queerness is made at the same time possible and difficult by our communities. In the earlier example of the athlete in the apple orchard, Browning accounts for how his unformulated senses of desire were made explicit years later in an argument with a fellow high school student:

I have long ago forgotten the content of the argument, but her final rejoinder remains as clear as the image of her bobbed strawberry blond hair and sharp-chinned, sallow face. 'Well,' she said, picking up her books, 'everybody knows you're queer.' 'What?' I remember thinking, and maybe saying, feeling not angry

¹¹⁷ It is also crucial to note the ways in which, as a result of some disorientations, new queer communities are fostered with new patterns of internal relational support, as in the cases of gay meccas formed by soldiers in San Francisco and New York City during the war when ships docked there (see Berube 2000; Shilts 1997), and subtle networks of support and protection established by queer and transgender individuals in the Old West (see 'Out West' exhibit).

or offended but completely confused. How could ‘everybody’ know the answer to the mystery that had so thoroughly eluded the person inside my body? (1993, 16)

In telling Browning what ‘everybody knows’ about him, his acquaintance introduces the possibility of an explicitly queer life; in the midst of Browning’s disorientation, she makes sense of what Browning had not yet identified as queer desire, while at the same time making it an unattractive, troubled possibility. We neither experience queerness, as accommodated or resistant possibility, apart from our inheritances, nor live queerly without having an impact on the futures of our communities. The high school student’s recognition of queerness might signify shifts in community norms to make the position of queerness *noticeable*, and Browning’s acceptance of the identity might make the student more able to see queerness as liveable — the student’s awareness of queerness might change her relation to it as a possibility in her own life. Recognitions of queerness do not occur without having an impact on both the recognizers and the recognized.

Returning to the harmful assumptions of heteronormativity, narratives that eclipse the complex way queer desire is made possible not only by objects of desire but also by many non-desirous/ing others threaten to overlook the multiplicity of ways queer desire comes into our experience and is allowed to remain and change. Particularly because sexual desire and orientations are not static or fixed, we need to further analyze stories about how we build (and are built into) community before ‘coming out’ and throughout future reorientations. Queerness might be made possible by our communities in surprising and even minor ways, as in Eli Clare’s description of looking back to the

clothing and fashion of the community he was born to, rather than to the explicitly gay and lesbian community around him, in order to figure out how to look queer (Clare 1999, 136). While Martin is right to claim that “access to lesbian and feminist communities, to the collective interpretive strategies and rhetoric developed there, has made positive self-definition and political activism possible” (1993, 281), our broader communities — the ones into which we were born, and the complex, troubled, diverse ones in which we find ourselves — can make such definition and activism possible too. Better relational frameworks can help create better sexual inheritances by making queer lives more liveable, supported, anticipated, and situated in communities.¹¹⁸ Supporters of anti-heteronormative activism should pay attention to the possibility of better relationalities in our communities of origin, especially because, as Ahmed rightly claims, “When we tread on paths that are less trodden... *we might need even more support*” (2006, 170, original emphasis).

Accounts of what happened after Shepard’s death show how members of the community took forward-looking responsibility for the harms caused by heteronormativity and made efforts to recreate inheritances to better allow for queer sexual orientations. How actual residents of Laramie experienced and continue to respond to the events surrounding Matthew’s death is more complex, nuanced, and contradictory than any film, memoir, or newspaper could portray. The community in Laramie did not all respond to Matthew’s death by re-evaluating problematic norms, nor

¹¹⁸ It is possible that the creation of less heteronormative sexual inheritances will create a world where it is less sexually disorienting to be a queer individual, and so someone might wonder if, on my account, that would be a loss for queer individuals. It might be a loss of some of what some queers have become accustomed to, but Ahmed’s account shows how much would be left: the excitement, the dynamism, and the pull of queer desire.

did all even agree that Matthew's death resulted from an anti-gay hate crime. Even so, in our current context, twelve years after Matthew's death, The Matthew Shepard Foundation and other organizations like the Human Rights Campaign sustain a fight for improved hate crime legislation and equality in the workplace, and we might find hope in the October 28, 2009 signing of Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act into U.S. law.¹¹⁹ *The Laramie Project* continues to be produced as a play, compelling new audiences to struggle towards recreating cities and towns where queer sexual orientations are more possible and less dangerous than they still are.

4. Conclusions

I am not simply saying that the sexual inheritances we create for our communities should support queer possibilities. This is presumably a fairly uncontroversial point. I am saying that we need to account for how queer sexual orientations can be allowed for by our social inheritances, and we should recognize how disorientations, in sexual contexts and elsewhere, can help us create more supportive inheritances. Disorientations are not politically powerful only in socio-sexual contexts. Pratt's, Du Bois', and Fanon's disorientations prompted political work to establish solidarity against racism; Brison's, Heyes', and Charles' disorientations prompted political work against harmful gender norms; Boler and other feminist educators understand the disorientations of students as having potential to spur new awareness of complicity and the roles students can play in

¹¹⁹ See the Human Rights Campaign's report of the progress: http://www.hrc.org/laws_and_elections/5660.htm. For more information on Matthew Shepard and anti-discrimination projects established in his memory, see the Matthew Shepard Foundation's website at www.matthewshepard.org. To date, Wyoming still lacks state-level legislation against hate crimes committed on the basis of sexual orientation.

creating more just situations for marginalized groups. Of course felt orientedness too can accompany solidarity and political action in ways which are sustaining, nourishing, and politically productive. I take my analysis of disorientation's political promise to be only part of the ongoing discussion about not only experienced agency, but also experienced activism.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have claimed that disorientations are aspects of human experience which can benefit moral agency. In chapter one, I introduced disorientations as experiences of unsettlement and discomfort, narrowing the spectrum of disorientations that interest me: those which occur at levels of body, affect, and knowledge, with effects that can change possibilities for moral action. Although I am interested in the prospect of how we might deliberately pursue disorientations productively, my focus has been on disorientations that come upon us as unchosen parts of our lives. In chapter two, I drew on examples of trauma, illness, oppression, and bodily self-transformations to show how disorientations can be both triggered by bodily experiences, and characterized in part by bodily dimensions of disruption and unease. In chapter three, I characterized affective dimensions of disorientation in periods of emotional turbulence and grief to clarify aspects of felt indeterminacy, felt tension, and affective swell. In chapter four, I drew on examples of self-doubt and education to suggest that epistemological dimensions of disorientations can disrupt belief formation, expectation, and the way we act in light of what we think we know. In chapter five, I situated my claims about disorientations' effects in an analysis of moral agency, focusing on moral contexts like those of pervasive injustice where our responsibilities can be complex and difficult to meet. Although not all disorientations will benefit agency—very severe disorientations can be responsibility undermining—I made two major claims in light of such moral contexts: (1) disorientations can benefit individuals' capacities to act morally; (2) acting responsibly can be disorienting. In chapter six, I applied my claims about the moral benefits of disorientation to political contexts of heterosexist injustice, claiming that sexual injustice

can be disorienting for both queers and non-queers, and that disorientations can have the potential to help us create better, more just sexual inheritances.

If disorientations can be as promising as I have claimed, then we need to consider how to respond to them in our own lives, in others' lives, and as phenomena of the social world. I want to conclude by exploring two prescriptive claims about experiences of disorientation, which I hope this thesis will prompt ethicists and social philosophers to consider: (1) we should reside in them when we can; and (2) we should create social conditions hospitable to those who are disoriented. To the extent that doing so is possible, we may have responsibilities to reside in disorientations, rather than resist or refuse them. Social conditions shape whether or how we experience, reside in, and benefit from disorientations. Who we are (psychological conditions) and who we are with (social conditions) are crucial factors in our experiences of disorientation, and can make the difference between disorientations which harm and disorientations which help.

1. Residing In Disorientation

I have claimed that disorientations connect to moral agency in two directions: disorientations can support moral agency, and acting morally can be disorienting. I now want to draw a third, more suggestive connection: acting morally might require that agents sometimes *reside in* disorientations, where 'reside' means something specific about the judgments we make and cultivate of ourselves as disoriented, and the attitudes we take within experiences of disorientations and in anticipation of or retrospection on

them.¹²⁰ I am using ‘reside in disorientation’ to mean a manner of inhabiting periods of disorientation, rather than racing out of them towards more orienting experiences, letting ourselves experience their dimensions, which involves a degree of acceptance of disorientations as common rather than rare, and of myself as someone who can be affected by them. Residing in disorientations is distinct from resisting them: resistance might involve thinking myself immune, thinking experiences of disorientation juvenile or luxury, and refusing to acknowledge how disorientations might have happened in the past, might be shaping my experience in the present, or benefiting my possibilities for agency in the future. We saw resistance to disorientation in Peirce’s characterization of our tendencies to “cling tenaciously” to what we believe (Peirce 1955, 10). To reside in disorientations might be framed as a call to a complex combination of attitude, judgment, identification, and response.¹²¹ Although we do sometimes disorient ourselves deliberately (e.g., sometimes seriously in major areas of our lives, or temporarily through trust-building exercises where we deliberately make ourselves lost in the wilderness so that we learn to better rely on each other), I have been most interested in our responses to the disorientations that come upon us unchosen. In response to non-deliberate disorientations, I am suggesting that we might be called to form particular attitudes of them, in anticipation of, or retrospection on them, to judge ourselves less harshly when disoriented, to identify as disorientable, and to respond in non-violent ways to

¹²⁰ I like Walker’s focus on assessing the “habitability of a particular form of moral-social life” (Walker 2007, 248) – asking what makes experiences influential and beneficial often involves asking in part what makes them liveable.

¹²¹ Holding that we are called morally to reside in disorientations could be complicated, given complexities around discussions of responsibilities for attitudes and their expressions (Hieronymi 2007). I am interested in how we may work out responsibilities to reside in disorientations in the future, but, as I claim here, they would in any case be conditional.

experiences of disorientation.¹²² Of course, it is not always safe for us to reside in disorientations: sometimes it is more important for us to survive than to experience being disoriented, and in unsafe environments or times of crisis we may need to set experiences of disorientation aside while we take care of the basic needs of ourselves and others.

The call to reside in disorientation could work alongside a call to recognize disorientations as ubiquitous, myself as potentially disoriented, and to engage in the experiences we have when we find ourselves in periods of disorientation. In this sense, we might connect the call to a point from Boler highlighted in chapter four: pedagogies of discomfort can aim to help ourselves and others inhabit less clear, more flexible senses of self (Boler 1999, 176). The call to reside in disorientation is partly a call to a certain way of identifying ourselves in the face of disorientations when they come to us.¹²³ The call would not be to take up residence—that is, not a call to take the disorientation I am currently in as my new default location, such that I make it my goal to become as comfortable as possible in being disoriented. It is not a goal to identify myself as one permanently disoriented, so much as to identify as disorientable, as one who accepts periods of disorientation while still experiencing them vividly—indeed, *in order to* experience them vividly.

¹²² Butler asks about the kind of less resistant response I have in mind as follows: “What might it mean to undergo violation, to insist upon *not* resolving grief and staunching vulnerability too quickly through a turn to violence, and to practice, as an experiment in living otherwise, nonviolence in an emphatically nonreciprocal response?” (Butler 2005, 100).

¹²³ It might be that this kind of identification happens at the same time that we become unable to stand for things to which we have been committed in the past, for example in Gary Watson’s sense of adopting ends, developing commitments, and standing for (2004, 270) – that is, residing in disorientation may mean a disruption in standing for. On certain views of integrity (e.g., Calhoun 1995; Williams 1995), this may mean that this puts our integrity at risk or to the test.

Although we cannot always control whether disorientations are part of our lives, the way we respond to them through residing or resisting can alter their effects. If I resist a period of disorientation, to the extent that I even acknowledge it as a possibility, perhaps by thinking I do not have time to have my attention diverted, or that I am not interested in becoming more vulnerable, or that engaging with disorientation would threaten my position or sense of self-worth, I may accurately gauge disorientation's potential effects and yet deny or block the way those effects can benefit me. If I am willing to reside in a particularly intense period of disorientation, it is likely to affect me in different ways, and where it affects me positively (e.g., through its tenderizing effects, or through the kind of relationality it prompts), it can be more likely to affect me more positively, or in more lasting ways. I am working with an assumption that we can have responsibilities to be open to our own moral development, where and when we are able to be, assuming that, at certain points, we can have responsibilities to not resist the kinds of experiences and situations that are likely to benefit us as agents. My claim that we can have responsibilities to reside in disorientations is a conclusion based on this premise—residing in disorientations can help strengthen their positive effects—and on my earlier arguments for how experiences of disorientation can be morally productive. Further, refusing to reside in disorientations can in some contexts be deeply irresponsible: for example, for someone facing serious illness and premature mortality to resist disorientations, deny that there is anything wrong, or relate to loved ones as though everything was going to be fine would be bad not only for themselves, but also for their loved ones. And vice versa, for their loved ones to fail to recognize the disorienting character of the time could also be deeply hurtful to the person who is ill. Residing *with*

others in the disorientation of their circumstance might be necessary in order to allow them to express their own struggles in the face of fear and loss, and to make such a difficult time liveable for everyone involved—we may have responsibilities to reside in disorientations in such circumstances.

A call to reside in disorientations would not override concerns about the potential harms of disorientation; rather, it would be mitigated by the real possibilities that disorientations at some times harm more than they help, even when we reside in them. It is a conditional rather than universal call, one dependent on circumstances. Note that I am not claiming we would have responsibilities to become or feel disoriented, nor to feel any way in particular about disorientations, nor to recognize the benefits of disorientation while in the midst of them, though we may decide to pursue these things. My claim is about a responsibility to position ourselves in a particular way towards the disorientations that come to us. I want to leave room for the fact that we may come to points of pursuing some disorientations while recognizing them for the complex and unpredictable experiences they are, perhaps alongside recognizing their potential benefits (e.g., when we pursue diversity education, when we involve ourselves in uncomfortable politics), and the fact that these pursuits might be morally good for us and others—but my project here is not to argue that we have responsibilities to do so. Having said this, I would suggest, tentatively, that residing in some unchosen disorientations now might make us less resistant or more open to pursuing other disorientations for political and moral reasons in the future.

We experience disorientation as humans; we fare better as agents, communities, living things and environments when disorientations benefit moral agents and the moral landscape as outlined in section two; and residing in disorientations when we experience them is a way to allow them to do so. Although I am interested in presenting a view of disorientation's promise which is compatible with ethical frameworks other than the one to which I am committed, it does seem best not to make sense of the call to reside in disorientations through an obligation to moral perfection, or through a view of disorientation as skill- or virtue-developer. It is not clear that there is skill involved in responding openly to disorientations, so much as recognitions of struggle, unpredictability of experience, and the tenuousness of our capacities to respond. Efforts to reside in disorientation were already at work in chapter two and three's descriptions of the intrigue of disorientation that motivated Heyes to sit with trigger poses and Charles to be patient with indeterminate feelings: there I claimed that, as intriguing, disorientations can motivate us to want to spend time with them. Here, I am claiming that sitting with disorientations can be good for our moral agency, and that, because residing in them can help strengthen and proliferate their benefits, we might have responsibilities to do so.

Many of the cases of disorientation I have drawn on in earlier chapters are examples of people residing in disorientations in the ways that interest me, partly by demonstrating patience with themselves when disoriented. Servan-Schreiber responds to the disorientation which accompanies his illness by cultivating more shared experience of disorientations. Gilman responds to the disorientation of her depression by staying alive and writing through periods of disorientation, eventually candidly about such periods.

Didion responds to the disorientation of grief with a non-violent curiosity, about her own behaviour and habits and the assumptions of others. Caryl Phillips responds to the disorientation of her 10-year life expectancy with self-reflection and increased sensitivity to experience. Du Bois responds to the disorientation of racialization with a deeper attentiveness to experiences of being black and a sense of the need to challenge politically systemic racism. In these cases, residing in disorientations means that those disoriented pay more attention to their experiences, and there seems to be in many cases a quality of patience to their ways of residing, though its emotional inflection is different in each case. Such patience may be cultivated in any number of ways, including the ways virtue theories explain (MacIntyre 2007, 242); we should not reside in disorientations to cultivate virtues, but may need to cultivate some virtues (like patience) to be able to reside in disorientations.

Residing in disorientations can involve expressing things about our experiences of them to others—many of the cases I consider are ones available because of the openness of these authors, theorists, and activists in expression. Sometimes individuals recognize calls to reside in disorientations in their everyday lives: Charles seems to do so when highlighting the possibility of denying the indeterminacy of emotions as a ‘cop out’. But we can be responding to the call to reside in the disorientations that come to us whether or not we know we are doing so. Awareness of the moral status of our action – i.e., the fact that what I am doing is more morally adequate than some alternative – is not required for Charles’ ways of residing in disorientations to count as a response to the moral call to do so. Of course, while we should be patient with ourselves in periods of upheaval,

experiences of disorientation can also shade into self-indulgence. At a certain point, it is more important to actually improve working conditions than to talk about my discomfort with shopping in North American department stores. Lesbian and black feminists have objected to the ways that white feminists have monopolized discussions about sexuality or racism by insisting on reporting their own discomfort around these topics. Patience is a finite resource that should not all go to myself.

Often residing in disorientations involves experiencing a tension between remembering feeling at home in the past and imagining feeling at home in better ways in the future – we could describe this metaphorically in terms of some degree of tension between leaving home and returning home. Such feelings of tension echo Campbell's call to resistant identification, where identifying wholeheartedly with our community of origin feels impossible, perhaps because of the ways our political commitments conflict with theirs, but wholly dis-identifying from them is also impossible because of the ways communities of origin shape our identities, and because of how we share responsibility for the ways their commitments continue to shape the world. Resistant identification is likely to be uncomfortable in part because of this tension. Pratt's way of residing in disorientation is a good example of the tension, not only for the ways her affective experiences of disorientation are in fact triggered in part by dis-affiliations and resistant re-identifications, but also for how she engages the disorientations which last in her life: openly, as though they can teach her something. Likewise, the call to reside in disorientations is a call to inhabit a more or less uncomfortable tension between past orientations and the possibility of future reorientations, and it is a call that comes from

the ways in which being disoriented can be morally beneficial. Adorno says that “it is part of morality never to be at home in one’s home” (Adorno 1974, 39). I am making a conceptually different and more limited claim: when faced with disorientations, to be ethical can be to reside in them in ways which feel like being never entirely in exile and never entirely at home.

2. Social Conditions Of Disorientation

Through the examples in chapters two to four, we have seen that social conditions make a difference to those experiencing disorientations. Tracking the ways that disorientations can benefit moral agents and the extent to which it can be possible to reside in them requires, in part, establishing the relevance of social conditions: the historical, political, social, and ideological contexts we live in that direct and shape the ways we experience and act. Psycho-social conditions can affect how possible it is to benefit from and/or reside in disorientations. It is not only the strength or kind of disorientations that is indexed to their potential benefits—a lot depends on the individual and communal resources of agents to face them. I said in chapter three that the difference between feeling ‘up in the air’ and feeling ‘out of control’ can be the difference between the disorientations that help and harm us; the conditions within which we experience disorientations have some power to make that difference in feeling.

I want to argue for the importance of conditions hospitable to those who are disoriented, while also clarifying the limits of what can be said from this theoretical

perspective. While we might be able to recognize the importance of hospitable circumstances from the theoretical level, we will not be able to determine the specifics of disorientation's felicity conditions all the way down. The claims I have made—especially that disorientations exist as part of human experience and can be characterized in particular ways—can help structure an understanding of what kinds of conditions can count as hospitable. If disorientations slow us down, an environment that does not force us to rush will be more hospitable than one which does, and so on. But we cannot work from existence claims to a failsafe understanding of conditions which will inevitably harm or help. We have seen, for example, that different degrees of disorientation can have significantly different effects, and that the differences in experience involved in occupying more or less privileged social positions are often relevant for our experiences of disorientation (see chapter four's discussion of class and education). If my claims about the moral promise of disorientations and the relevance of context to the way individuals can take them up or experience them are convincing to researchers in psychology or other disciplines, perhaps worked-out visions of practical application will follow.

The ways others act towards us when we are disoriented can have impacts on how we experience disorientations: whether, how well, or how long we are able to reside in them, and how well they can benefit us. We know that some social conditions can keep individuals in periods of disorientation not by being hospitable but by being *inhospitable*, for example, by responding to the disoriented person's behavior and needs in ways which further alienate or marginalize her. Hospitable conditions might be thought of as those

which make disorientations more liveable where we find ourselves, for example through making homes, workplaces, and towns places where it is acceptable to feel and act somewhat disoriented (e.g., making it okay for Brison to be disoriented when she goes back to teaching, making Gilman's new life in the West as a working artist and single mother liveable). As Brison and others have shown, because disorientations can cause individuals to become open and susceptible to the influence of others, those who interact with us when we are disoriented can have a great deal of influence and power. The creation of more hospitable conditions for disoriented individuals might be something for which both individuals and institutions bear some degree of responsibility.

Others' ways of responding to us when we are disoriented can offer us kind of a 'toehold': in the sense of some kind of trustworthy support, often found in the secure friendship or committed presence of another or others. Others can recognize us as disoriented in ways which do not require that we act oriented in order to interact with them, that we be on our way to reorientation, or that we understand our own disorientations. In doing so, they respond to us in ways which are generous and interpretively kind to our experiences. Others can be toeholds even when disoriented themselves. I'm thinking of toeholds more in terms of ways to *hold on*, or *go on* (in the sense of survive) within disorientation, than in terms of ways to *move on* out of disorientations into reorientations. The main function of others as toeholds is not to interact with us in ways which reorient us, so much as to meet us in ways which make disorientations liveable. Others might be seen as toeholds in Servan-Schreiber's example of helping the woman in the parking lot, when Didion's colleagues arrive after her

husband dies, and when Brison thanks her partner for having stayed. Butler describes how the inevitable failure to fully recognize or know myself – the inevitable opacity of myself – can “constitute a disposition of humility and generosity alike: I will need to be forgiven for what I cannot have fully know, and I will be under a similar obligation to offer forgiveness to others, who are also constituted in partial opacity to themselves” (Butler 2005, 42). Recognizing disorientation might be somewhat like recognizing opacity here: such recognitions give opportunities to understand ourselves as at the same time disorientable and others as disoriented, fostering humility about ourselves and generosity and hospitality for others.

The relation of privilege to experiences of disorientation is complex: positions of privilege which provide material comforts, free time, and space to experience being disoriented do not necessarily constitute conditions which help us reside in disorientations. Shifts in our position as privileged or marginalized can themselves trigger disorientations. The comforts we get as privileged can be obstacles in experiences of disorientation (e.g., some black feminists rightly worry that white women might have too much to lose for them to be radicals). As we have seen from the examples I draw on in chapters two to four involving individuals from all over a spectrum of privilege, with various kinds of privilege also can come, for example, expectations that I will be too self-controlled to be deeply disoriented and expectations that I will be secure. Disorientations can dislocate and incapacitate across various degrees of privilege, and various contexts of privilege and marginalization can support us in different ways while disoriented. As hooks (1990; 2009) attests, marginalization happens at the group level: marginalized

communities are often deeply supportive of their members, and can also be very aware of the disorientations their members are likely to experience: members of marginalized groups may be better supported and less isolated than more dominant individuals. Even if we live within structures and situations that are fundamentally unequal, not every interaction within them is among unequals. We can receive support within marginalized groups through family, tradition, and ideology (e.g., First Nations' individuals might receive ideological support from longstanding traditions). The specifics of how privilege shapes our experiences of disorientation are murky, like the specifics of exactly which social conditions could guarantee that disorientations have good rather than bad outcomes.

Four points are important here: first, disorientations exist as ubiquitous parts of our experience. Second, they can benefit our possibilities for moral agency. Third, strengthened possibilities for moral agency are something we as communities should want. Fourth, disorientations can be more likely to strengthen us when we are in social contexts that allow them to do so. On the basis of these premises and the above claims that particular social conditions can allow disorientations to be more likely to be liveable and beneficial and that we as communities can shape conditions to be more or less likely to do such strengthening, I am suggesting something about the kinds of social contexts we should create – ones that make it more likely that disorientations will benefit us.

Because of how hard it is to tell the specifics of what conditions will be helpful in most cases of disorientation, one thing that may be called for is increased sensitivity to

vulnerability to disruption, playing out as increased attention to individual others' capacities for experiencing disorientations. Not surprisingly, our own experiences of disorientation sometimes helps us cultivate the very capacities that can allow for building worlds more hospitable to disorientation – by helping us cultivate increased sensitivity to vulnerability, among other capacities. As disoriented, we can become better able to recognize the needs and capacities of our own bodies and those of others, and we might also become more sensitive to the cases in which disorientation can be productive and the cases in which it cannot. Anticipating others' thresholds for managing or coping with disorientation can help us engage with them in ways which make positive developments of moral agency more reachable. Drawing on Boler's example of pedagogies of discomfort, as teachers, we can create educational contexts more hospitable to the disorientations of self-doubt in part when we have experienced such disorientations before, have had our sensitivities honed, and have become better able to recognize students' capacities for experiencing disorientations. Teachers' increased capacities for moral prioritizing, multidimensional experience, loosened rather than rigid views, expectations, and identifications, and curiosity about calls to action we do not understand can also help create educational conditions more hospitable to disoriented learners.

Someone might object that my claim that we should create social conditions more hospitable to disorientation is in tension with my claim that disorientations can be productive, insofar as the *strain* of being disoriented in our current context might be part of what makes disorientations productive. My response would be the following: conditions that are less anti-disorientation are not conditions that make disorientations

non-disorienting, nor are they conditions that turn disorientation into reorientation. The social conditions I have in mind are those that make disorientations liveable. It seems impossible to think of conditions that would be *too* hospitable to disorientations. In many current contexts, disorientations are made so unliveable that disoriented people are pushed to reorient immediately. Anti-disorientation social conditions may more often prompt forced reorientation, by framing disorientations as signs of weakness, disabling, or optional. Better conditions would not make disorientations any less disorienting or worthwhile, they would make them more reside-able, giving us more time to experience and learn within them.

It might be further questioned: would enacting responsibility still be disorienting within better social conditions? Yes, because most of what is disorienting about enacting responsibility has to do with the complexity of some parts of the moral landscape, the complexity of calls to action, and the fact of needing to act into an unknown future. These are characteristics built into the current moral landscape, particularly in complex contexts of injustice and difficulty. Better social conditions for disorientations are not likely to change them.

3. Conditions For Spurring Political Change

I am interested in the promise of disorientations in helping spur political change. I have focused throughout on disorientations as individual experiences, but in fact disorientations sometimes affect a broad cross-section of communities, so that many

people experience disorientations triggered by the same event, at the same time. Such disorientations can be disoriented by physical, emotional, or cognitive shifts (e.g., a major earthquake, the looping footage of planes crashing on September 11, 2001, or the introduction of a theory of evolution). Although the disorientations may be experienced in different ways by different individuals within a community, when many people are triggered to be disoriented at the same time, opportunities can open up for shared action towards political change. I focused in the last chapter on highlighting the political promise of individual experiences of disorientation in socio-sexual contexts. When more than one individual becomes disoriented at the same time, by the same event, as when members of a family are disoriented after one of their teens comes out as gay, or as when a majority of residents of Laramie are all disoriented after Shepard's death, the phenomenon of disorientation becomes more complex, and questions about collectivity are raised. How do experiences of disorientation change when multiple individuals experience them together? The suggestion of *collective disorientation* raises a number of questions: can communities experience disorientations? What kind of experience would it be? How would the various levels of disoriented experience (i.e., bodily, affective, epistemological) play in? How might the disorientations of communities be morally and politically promising in ways distinct from individual disorientations? Collective disorientations are likely to be less clear in connection to moral agency, largely because identifying collective disorientations is more complex: given how important we might think epistemological access is to understanding disorientation, it may be difficult to determine who will know when groups are disoriented, and how they will recognize such disorientation. The case of Laramie is instructive in considering the possibility of

collective disoriented experience. In Laramie, we know that many individuals were disoriented by the same event, communicated about their disorientations with one another, and pursued joint efforts for political change partly as a result of their disoriented experiences. My project has been to characterize individual experiences of disorientation and the moral and political promise of such experiences, as well as some of the kinds of conditions that can make disorientations liveable for individuals – so my account cannot support much more than speculation about how groups or whole communities might be disoriented by shared experiences. Work could be done to establish the promise of collective experiences of disorientation in contexts of crisis, and establish a framework for evaluating the benefits of disorientations for helping groups and communities be more responsible, but that would go beyond the scope of what I have hoped to establish here.

Hospitable conditions for disorientations cannot be determined such that disorientations are guaranteed to be politically productive. Individuals within various communities need to take up multiple kinds of action to support vulnerable others in periods of disorientation, and the political contexts of heteronormative communities are just one example. Since many disorientations in the sexual contexts I have described *require* the establishment of new modes of relationship, new self-conceptions, and new ways of being embodied and *make possible* the development of better ways of doing these things, hospitable conditions will often be those that support these processes by providing disoriented individuals supported time, open interpersonal engagement, and protection from harmful manipulative forces. Hospitality also comes to us through the

‘toeholds’ described here: through others who continue to be loving presences in our lives when we struggle to enact queerness in our churches, struggle to support queer students on campus, or struggle to recognize the ways in which the laws we enforce remain heteronormative. Toeholds might be most likely to remind us that changing identities, experiences, norms, and patterns of action can be politically promising at the same time as they are personally challenging.

As we saw with Young and Walker in chapter five, it can be difficult to negotiate concrete calls to specific action from individuals (e.g., make it less difficult for gay men to adopt children) at the same time as more general senses of injustice from the moral landscape itself (e.g., people should not die for having marginalized identities). My claims about why acting morally can be disorienting apply to political action in the socio-sexual context as well: working towards less heteronormative sexual inheritances can require inhabiting new relationships, situations, and environments, and creating and re-creating identities and affiliations in ways which can be disorienting.

In the span of less than three weeks in September 2010, four teenagers in the US killed themselves in response to anti-gay bullying: Billy Lucas, 15, in Greensburg, Indiana; Tyler Clementi, 18, in New Brunswick, New Jersey; Asher Brown, 13, in Houston, Texas; and Raymond Chase, 19, in Providence, Rhode Island. Being queer (or believed to be queer) as a teenager can still make it more likely that you will die, at others hands or your own. Their deaths have prompted much social attention, concern, and disbelief about the struggles of being a queer teen, and major discussions about what can

be done to make queerness less dangerous for teenagers. There is a widely shared sense of individuals feeling compelled to do something, to play a role in making social change on behalf of these and other queer kids, but also a widely shared struggle to know what should be done. Dan Savage, sex-advice columnist started an online collection of videos aimed at queer teens under the ‘It Gets Better’ campaign, where queer adults talk to queer teens about reasons to stick out difficult teenagehoods: they can grow up, move to places (most often cities) where they will be more accepted. High schools and YouTube videos have addressed teen bullies with a need to stop bullying queer students now, with threats of punishment. Ellen DeGeneres posted a short video online addressing the need for all adults to view these deaths as a crisis, to pay attention to what needs to be done, and concluding with: “These kids needed us, and we have an obligation to change this...Things will get easier. People’s minds will change. And you should be alive to see it.” As was the case in Laramie, but now with increasingly internet-based media, much of the coverage of the deaths has been glossy and insufficiently nuanced, with conflicting reports of what happened, and where. But there has also been significant response from various internet communities, through notes on facebook, blog entries, and overwhelmingly through videos posted by individuals on YouTube.

These responses to the crisis are directed to individuals harmed, individuals who share identities with those harmed, individual harmers, or to broader communities of diverse identities and interests. Most likely some combination of these approaches is most desirable: any one alone seems unlikely to be productive. Addressing queer teens with a need to protect themselves and eventually break from their communities as the ‘It

'Gets Better' approach tries to do responds to the depth of harm they can be facing and the non-ideal reality of completely unsafe social situations, but it neglects the ways queers and their communities might be supporting each other in the short run and might need each other in the long run, and overshadows the ongoing threat of heteronormativity outside of communities of origin—Clementi and Chase both killed themselves after leaving home for university. Addressing queer adults who share identities and identity-related concerns with queer teens as the 'It Gets Better' project also does can help motivate action in groups of people who are already likely to understand, sympathize with, and anticipate the needs of queer teens; but it may also over-emphasize the interests of specific queer adults (e.g., the ones who are openly queer enough to post a video of themselves online, the ones who enjoy well-funded, healthy lives) and neglect the need to improve queer teens lives *in* their communities, *now*, and the further need to improve the communities that future children will be born into and that some queer adults need to stay in. Addressing young anti-queer bullies as some high schools and YouTube videos do is deeply troubling for the individualistic stance it takes on the situation: teenagers who bully do not develop heteronormative beliefs in a vacuum, and they do not succeed in bullying without some degrees of structural, institutional support (e.g., high-schools that do not have the resources for anti-homophobia education; social networking sites that make sharing personal videos easy)—as in all institutions and public spaces, questions of regulation and recreation are difficult, but shouldering young bullies with the responsibilities for these deaths is short-sighted. Addressing broader communities as DeGeneres and others have tried to do is an important approach that situates these deaths as the shared problem it is, but while the approach is properly about shared action, it also

threatens to overlook the need to address diverse queer backgrounds, the need to work at individual, local, and institutional levels (e.g., questions of mental health care, the rural/urban divide in queer communities, gun control) to better support queer lives, and the need to ask bigger questions about intersecting harms and queers (e.g, First Nations' teen suicides are still alarmingly common; trans teen needs overlap with queer teen needs).

The weight of these deaths has been disorienting for individuals who have paid attention. My hope is that claims about the political promise of disorientations to motivate sensitivity, highlight power structures, help us notice urgent calls to action, and create better relational frameworks can be true of this situation and others where possibilities of creating more just social structures are open to us. The individuals working hardest and best in these cases seem to embody my claim that acting responsibly might more often feel like we don't know what we are doing but are doing something anyway than that we do know what we are doing and are doing it.

4. Conclusions

Disorientations are powerful and dangerous. I have aimed to clarify what disorientations have the power to do, as well as to clarify some of the most important points from a tradition that overemphasizes their danger. I am interested in highlighting the importance of creating social conditions which make it more possible for us to benefit from or reside in disorientations, though I have claimed that it is not possible to specify which

conditions can ensure that disorientations become promising rather than debilitating. What works to make, for example, Pratt's disorientation productive and Roquentin's destructive is complicated: beyond the fact that their disorientations are different, their social conditions are different, complexly shaping the experience and results of their disorientations. There is no way to pull apart exactly how from a conceptual perspective.

As Susan Babbitt claims:

The dark waters of moral understanding consist in the fact that in cases in which there is reason to think that more adequate moral meaning needs to be discovered, one cannot expect to possess in advance sufficient assurance that the commitments one makes in order to investigate and discover such meaning will be successful or even understandable. And the risk is that if they are not, one cannot go back to what or who one was before one undertook such commitments. (Babbitt 1999, 252)

Like Babbitt's description of the risk of facing dark waters, the risk of disorientations is that they can be powerful enough to change us without us knowing how we will be changed. That risk is sufficient reason neither for responsible individuals to resist experiences of disorientation for fear they will harm capacities for agency, nor for moral theorists to neglect the potential for disorientations to spur positive moral change. Having acknowledged that disorientations are complex, risky experiences, perhaps the most important first step forward for both agents and theorists is to find and describe ways in which communities can meet those disoriented and environments can support those disoriented such that disorientations are recognized more as part of moral life than as antithetical to it.

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