

The Violence of Judgement and the Judgement of Violence: feminist reflections

- a peacemaker who does not resolve but instead expresses the conflicts she experiences may be a more fitting guide for actual peacemakers, women and men, who live in radically different relations to battle and everywhere disagree among themselves (Ruddick 1998: 224)

My point, though, is not to paralyse judgment or to undermine normative claims, but to insist that we must devise new constellations for thinking about normativity if we are to proceed in intellectually open and comprehensive ways to grasp and evaluate our world. (Butler 2009: 144-5)

The aim of this paper is to open up discussion of the meaning of feminist *moral* judgment. In doing so, it raises but does not resolve questions about the substance of feminist moral judgments, or how feminist moral judgment relates to feminist political judgment. In the paper, I use the example of feminist debates about the ethics of political violence, specifically of pacifism and just war, to try to demonstrate two key points: first, that feminist moral judgments about war and peace may, but need not be, violent; second, that feminist non-violent judgments about war and peace, though unheroic, are neither safe nor non-normative.

There is, clearly, an issue here about the use of the term ‘violence’, sliding between the realms of judgment and of war. In applying the term ‘violence’ to judgment I am reflecting themes in poststructuralist and Arendtian philosophical treatments of judgement. To speak of the violence of judgment is to draw attention to formal parallels between operations of thought and practices of killing and injuring, and thus to dramatise fears of authoritarianism in thought that have become central to debates in feminist moral and political philosophy in recent years, and arguably to feminist political practice. One of the questions that motivates this Symposium is whether feminists have become afraid of judgment. This paper argues that fear of judgment is what pushes it towards violence, what feminists should be afraid of, therefore, is not judgment but the illusion of judgment that claims invulnerable authority.

The paper proceeds in four stages:

1. The Violence of Judgment. This section tries to unpack the reasons why feminists might be wary of moral judgment. Why might such judgments be understood as violent? It locates these reasons in three characteristics of ideal-type accounts of moral judgment that dominate contemporary moral philosophy:
 - a. Epistemic;
 - b. Legislative;
 - c. Self-certain
2. Feminist Judgment of Violence. This section explores two threads in feminist moral thinking about the ethics of political violence: pacifism and just war. It aims to show how, in debates between these positions, feminist moral judgment takes on the epistemic, legislative and self-certain characteristics inherent in the violence of judgment explored in Section 1.
3. Feminist Non-Violence. This section engages with a different trajectory in feminist thinking about the ethics of war, one that refuses the choice between pacifism and just war and, in doing so, opens up a different idea of moral judgment, one that is self-consciously distant from the epistemic, legislative, self-certain characteristics of violent judgment. This turn to non-violence, in judgment and in action, is exemplified in the work of Sara Ruddick, and has also recently begun to be explored in Judith Butler’s work.
4. Non-Violent Judgment. This section argues that, in thinking judgment and non-violence together, Ruddick and Butler give us interesting starting points for re-thinking feminist moral judgment along different kinds of lines. Non-violent judgment is practical as opposed to epistemic; regulative rather than legislative; vulnerable rather than self-certain. This doesn’t mean, however, that it is non-normative, or, indeed free from the risks of violence. Feminist non-violent judgments, which will always differ in their substantive claims, are fighting judgments.

In conclusion, I would like to pick up on the question of the relation/ differentiation between moral and political judgment in feminism. It seems to me that moral judgment is political, in the sense that it has a politics. But I am not sure that this renders moral and political judgment equivalent. The difference, perhaps, relates to the ‘who’ of judgment, it seems to me that moral judgment involves putting the self at stake more centrally than is the case with political judgment – but I am not sure that this is right.