

Research Statement

Tamara Fakhoury
University of Minnesota - Twin Cities

Overview

My research focuses on the ethics and moral psychology of resisting oppression. I am especially interested in the normative reasons that individuals have for (and against) resisting their oppression, what resistance entails for people who are differently situated, and how conditions of oppression shape what it means to live a good and meaningful life. My recent work addresses a range of under-theorized resistance practices, including what I call Quiet Resistance and Imperfect Resistance, and the virtues that are displayed in individuals who engage in them, such as rebelliousness, audacity, and integrity. I have special interests in decolonial resistance in the Arab world and issues at the intersection of sexism and anti-Arab/anti-Muslim discrimination in the West.

Current discussions in the ethics of resistance are largely focused on questions of moral obligation. Moreover, much attention has been given to acts of resistance that are used as a means of large-scale political change or public communication. In contrast, my research aims to address the more personal dimensions of resistance, which have largely been neglected. More specifically, I argue that personal projects and relationships provide distinctive reasons for oppressed persons to resist their oppression. Such reasons are not guaranteed to cohere with impartial considerations of justice and morality, and this ought to inform our ethical thinking about the nature and value of resistance more generally.

I am currently working on a book titled *Reasons to Resist*. The book has two overarching aims. The first is to expand philosophical discussion of the kinds of normative reasons that may guide and motivate resistance practices. The second aim of the book is to highlight the ethical value of a range of resistance actions that differ substantially from well-known moral ideals of resistance, such as those most vividly and familiarly expressed in Dr. King's political thought. My recent publications include: "Wadi Climbing: Quiet Resistance in the West Bank" in *The Radical Philosophy Review*, "Non-Normative Behavior and the Virtue of Rebelliousness" in *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, "Violent Resistance as Radical Choice" in *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*, and "Quiet Resistance: The Value of Personal Defiance" in *The Journal of Ethics*.

Abstracts for my published and in-progress papers are included below, and all papers are available upon request.

"Eight Dimensions of Resistance"

2019. *Pacifism, Politics, and Feminism*, ed. J. Kling, Brill.

Resisting oppression evokes images of picket lines and crowds of protestors demanding large-scale reform. But not all resistance is political or publicly broadcast. Some acts of resistance are done alone, privately, aim to achieve purely personal goals, and may not even be recognizable as resistance by others. I present a taxonomy of resistance to oppression that distinguishes acts of resistance along four dimensions: their subject (who

is resisting? An individual or a group?), target (what is being resisted? a public policy or private circumstance?), scope (whose interests are being defended or advanced by the act of resistance?), and tone (does the resistance aim to send a message to the public?). The taxonomy brings to light a range of actions that tend to be neglected and that ethical theories of resistance should be able to accommodate.

“Quiet Resistance: The Value of Personal Defiance”

2020. *The Journal of Ethics*.

What reason does one have to resist oppression? The reasons that most easily come to mind are those having to do with justice—reasons that arise from commitments to human equality and the common good. In this paper, I argue that there are also reasons of love—reasons that arise from personal attachments to specific people, projects, or activities. I defend a distinctive form of resistance that is characteristically undertaken for reasons of love, which I call Quiet Resistance. Contrary to theories that build reasons of justice into the definition of resistance, I argue that we have strong reason to consider Quiet Resistance a genuine form of resistance. Finally, I argue that the reasons in favor of engaging in Quiet Resistance help to explain its distinctive value. In short, when one engages in Quiet Resistance, one’s actions are valuable in large part because they allow one to maintain respect for one’s personal values and meaning in life under oppressive conditions.

“Violent Resistance as Radical Choice”

2022. *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*

What reasons stand in favor of (or against) violent resistance to oppression? I distinguish two kinds of normative reasons that bear relevantly in such a practical deliberation. I argue that in addition to reasons of impartial morality, victims’ personal projects and relationships may also provide reasons for (or against) violent resistance. Moreover, there is no guarantee that conflicts will not occur between such reasons. Thus, some acts of violent resistance may arise from situations of radical choice in which impartial moral reasons and personal reasons pull the agent in opposite directions. Regardless of what we ultimately think agents facing such decisions ought to do, all things considered, recognizing such conflicts is crucial for understanding the circumstances that give rise to violence and for better sympathizing with victims who are pushed to such extreme modes of resistance.

“Oppositional Anger: Aptness without Appreciation”

2021. *Social Philosophy Today*.

What makes anger an appropriate response to systemic injustice? Let us assume that it cannot merely be its positive effects. That is, sometimes we should be angry even when getting angry is bound to make things worse. What makes such anger appropriate? According to Amia Srinivasan (2017), counterproductive anger is only apt if it passes a necessary condition that I call the Matching Constraint: one’s personal reason for getting

angry must match the fact that justifies their anger. When the Matching Constraint is satisfied, anger can be an intrinsically worthwhile way of affectively appreciating injustice. I argue that the Matching Constraint is incorrect. More precisely, I take issue with its status as a necessary condition on apt anger. Anger can be an apt response to injustice even when it fails to be a form of affective appreciation. Often enough, one does not know why they are angry, or one is angry for reasons other than those that justify their anger. For all that, it may still be appropriate for them to be angry. After presenting several cases of apt anger that fail the Matching Constraint, I suggest an alternative standard for aptness based on the general function of anger in our psychology. On my view, anger is apt when and because it alerts one, however coarsely or crudely, to threats against one's values.

“Non-Normative Behavior and the Virtue of Rebelliousness”

Journal of Value Inquiry, 2023.

For many people subjected to systemic injustice, life under oppression involves participating in what philosophers have called “non-normative behavior,” or behavior that fails to comply with oppressive norms. Discussions of the value of such actions tend to emphasize the benefits they have for other people who are subjugated. I argue that while benefiting others is a noble goal, there are oppressed persons for whom such altruistic reasons do not apply. For all that, acting non-normatively may still be ethically worthwhile. I highlight another source of value for non-normative behavior, stemming from one's personal projects and relationships. Finally, I argue that having a disposition to engage in non-normative actions in the right way - a trait which I call rebelliousness - is a virtue under oppression, the right reasons for which include both altruistic and non-altruistic concerns.

“Wadi Climbing: Quiet Resistance in the West Bank”

The Radical Philosophy Review, 2024 (forthcoming).

Palestinian rock climbers in the West Bank ascend towering limestone cliffs despite being forcibly dispossessed and targeted by Israeli military and violent settlers. This paper examines their actions from the perspective of Quiet Resistance – a form of resistance where one is motivated by personal reasons to pursue activities that are obstructed by oppression. I explain what Quiet Resistance is, how it differs from political protest, and what makes it distinctively valuable. Then, I explain how Quiet Resistance allows the Palestinian climbers to maintain sources of meaning in life under oppressive circumstances. Further, as a form of symbolic action, it allows the climbers to forge a profound connection to their rightful land.

“Feminist Philosophy and Film: The Conditions of Sexual Violence in Marilyn Frye's 'Sexism' and Joyce Chopra's *Smooth Talk*”

Co-authored with Philip Bold, in *Visions of Peace and Nonviolence in Popular Culture*, Brill, ed. Kling (forthcoming).

Eliminating sexual violence requires understanding where it comes from and why it happens. We must learn to detect when the grounds for violence are being built up so that we can promptly take them down. How can we improve our ability to notice the subtle practices of sexism and make them a matter of critical reflection? The aim of this paper is to show how film can enhance critical perception of the social conditions that give rise to sexual violence in particular. We do this by way of a specific example, showing how Joyce Chopra's 1985 film *Smooth Talk* serves to display the complex circumstances that make sexual violence likely – thereby illustrating Frye's philosophical insight about the interconnected mechanisms of oppression.

“Violent Resistance to Sexual Violence”

(under review)

Some victims of sexual violence fight back, seriously harming their abusers as a way of taking power or exacting retribution. Although violence always raises moral questions, there is nevertheless something impressive about those whose actions succeed in posing a formidable challenge to their oppression. The aim of this paper is to offer two ways of thinking about the ethical value of such non-ideal acts of resistance. First, violent resistance may allow victims to maintain ground projects that are being undermined by their abusers. Second, violent resistance may display what I call the virtue of *audacious integrity* - a willingness to take moral risks, that is, to act in ways that may arouse severe moral censure, in order to uphold one's values. Both explanations illustrate that victims of sexual abuse may choose to engage in violent resistance for a variety of ethical reasons, including but not limited to paradigmatic moral considerations.

“Audacious Integrity: On the Value of Imperfect Resistance”

(in progress)

Sometimes oppressed individuals resist their oppression by engaging in actions that we would ordinarily consider morally wrong or questionable. They may, for example, use unnecessary violence against oppressors, steal as a form of payback for unjust treatment, or systematically deceive those with greater privilege as a means of satisfying personal desires that they are being blocked from pursuing. They may do this, moreover, when there are other options available. The apparent moral transgression is neither necessary for their survival, nor is it the only viable option for resistance. This paper is about the value of such actions, which I will call *imperfect resistance*. I argue that acts of imperfect resistance may exhibit the virtue of *audacious integrity* - a willingness to take moral risks, that is, to act in ways that may arouse severe moral censure, in order to uphold one's values. While it is not unique to imperfect resistance, audacious integrity is particularly impressive when it is displayed in that context. This is because the stage is often set for imperfect resistance when, due to social or epistemic injustices, the morally best course of action is unclear or appears to be an inadequate response to an oppressive situation. Where others may be diminished or immobilized by moral risks and uncertainties, agents with audacious integrity act boldly on their best judgement, despite the real possibility of failure.

Reasons to Resist

(Book project in progress)

The book has two overarching aims. The first is to expand philosophical discussion of the kinds of normative reasons that may guide and motivate resistance practices. The second aim of the book is to highlight the ethical value of a range of resistance actions that differ substantially from well-known moral ideals of resistance, such as those most vividly and familiarly expressed in Dr. King's political thought.

Standard views assume that resistance is always (or always should be) pursued for paradigmatic moral reasons, i.e., reasons arising from our obligations to others and commitments to upholding impartial moral values like justice, human equality, or the common good. By contrast, I argue that a variety of ethical values may provide people with reasons to resist their oppression and that such reasons may include but are not limited to paradigmatic moral considerations, such as those having to do with our moral obligations.

Accepting a more inclusive view of the reasons that may guide and motivate resistance practices allows us to recognize forms of resistance that have been previously overlooked. I introduce and illustrate the concept of *imperfect resistance*, which captures a broad range of resistance actions that differ substantially from well-known moral ideals of resistance, such as those most vividly and familiarly expressed in Dr. King's political thought. King believed that resisters should adhere to high moral standards in their actions against oppression. In the ideal of nonviolent resistance, individuals are motivated by *agape* - an altruistic and disinterested goodwill for all humanity - to advance society's moral development. By contrast, in imperfect resistance, individuals are motivated by non-moral reasons and may deliberately flout or violate moral principles, using actions that would ordinarily arouse blame or moral censure. I consider two specific forms of imperfect resistance (1) *violent resistance* - resistance which aims to harm oppressors as a way of taking power or exacting retribution (Chapter 4) - and (2) *quiet resistance* - resistance which aims primarily to uphold personal projects and relationships that are being undermined by oppression.

Finally, the book aims to articulate what might be said in favor of imperfect resistance (e.g., violent resistance and quiet resistance). I focus specifically on illuminating the *ethical* value of imperfect resistance, that is, its value from the point of view of what it means for a person to live a good and meaningful life under circumstances of systemic injustice. Thus, I consider what the use of imperfect resistance conveys about the life or character of an individual being subjected to oppression. This is distinct from the question of whether imperfect resistance is valuable from a political point of view. The main focus of my inquiry is not, for instance, whether imperfect resistance is an effective way of bringing about circumstances of justice writ large, or whether it is consistent with the rules and values of a democracy.

One way to investigate the ethical value of imperfect resistance is to consider whether such actions display any virtues - that is, cultivated dispositions that, when performed well, are conducive to living a good and meaningful life. I argue that imperfect resisters can display virtues like *rebelliousness*, i.e., a disposition to act non-normatively with respect to oppressive norms, and *audacious integrity*, i.e., a willingness to take moral risks, that is, to act in ways that may arouse severe moral censure, in order to defend and uphold their values (Chapter 5). Moreover, engaging in imperfect resistance may allow

individuals to maintain ties with personal projects that they are being blocked from pursuing, to take a meaningful stand against their oppression, and defend against its harms. Finally, some acts of imperfect resistance may be necessary as a means of bringing about morally worthy ends in society that cannot be achieved through paradigmatically moral means. Sometimes, for instance, raising critical consciousness or inciting public dialogue over injustices requires dirtying one's hands.

Future Research

A Philosophical Guide to Resisting Oppression

Future Book Project

This book project will provide a philosophical guide for resisting oppression. Each chapter will be devoted to a practical question (or set of related questions) that may arise for an oppressed person engaged in, or deliberating about whether to engage in, an act of resistance. Drawing from news stories, film, literature, and personal experience, a major aim of the book would be to illustrate a spectrum of resistance practices (ranging from quiet resistance to protest to violent resistance) and provide a new way of thinking about their value, one that represents a diversity of ways in which resistance may contribute meaningfully to a person's life and veers away from hasty moralizing about such issues.

Questions discussed in this book will include: Do I have a moral obligation to resist (e.g., to confront a sexual harasser), or can I refrain from resisting without doing wrong? When deliberating about how and whether to resist, should moral considerations be given utmost priority? Am I ever justified in resisting (e.g., by engaging in some form of non-normative behavior) purely out of self-interest or for the sake of my own pleasure, or should my resistance be motivated by altruistic values (e.g., to benefit other victims)? When faced with multiple forces of injustice (e.g., racism and sexism), how do I figure out which (if any) to resist (especially when I am unable to resist both, or when resisting one involves neglecting or being complicit in another)? What if resistance requires me to sacrifice my personal values, for instance, by jeopardizing relationships with my family or other oppressed persons in my community? Am I ever justified in flouting moral rules or harming others for the sake of my own liberation? How should I weigh and balance the collateral damage that often comes with acts of resistance?

The Ethics and Moral Psychology of Resistance: An Anthology

Future Book Project

The aim of this book project is to produce an anthology that spotlights cutting edge work in the ethics and moral psychology on resistance to oppression. My plan is to fill a major gap in a literature which tends to focus on either the political or epistemological dimensions of resistance.