

Marguerite La Caze  
*Wonder and Generosity: Their Role in Ethics and Politics*  
Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013  
ISBN 978-1-4384-4676-9

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The concept of wonder is central to Western philosophy's narrative of origin. Philosophy is said to begin in wonder ultimately unfolding into true knowledge. Over the last few decades, the concept slowly but surely gained attention from feminist scholars. Broadening the term from being merely an epistemological means to an end--knowledge--wonder gradually became an end in itself. The concept of wonder started and is still in the process of being developed as an ethical approach to others, an issue ever so pressing on feminist agendas.

Marguerite La Caze's recent book *Wonder and Generosity: Their Role in Ethics and Politics* takes up this more engaged mobilization of wonder. La Caze builds upon the work of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray in particular, who famously used wonder to describe an ideal form of relating to sexual difference. La Caze enhances her theory in two major ways: First, she argues that "wonder" at the difference of the other alone is not enough for a truly ethical mode of relating, adding the concept of "generosity" to complete this aim. Second, whereas Irigaray is concerned mainly with sexual difference, La Caze puts to use wonder, generosity, and the other concepts that flow from them for all kinds of differences along axes such as race and class. In doing so, she convincingly sheds light upon the urgent question of how we can relate to others in a respectful, nonappropriative way. Located at the intersection of (feminist) philosophy, political philosophy, and ethics, this publication makes a valuable theoretical contribution to these fields, while grappling with some of today's most pressing ethico-political questions: how do we relate to oppressed others such as refugees, or even to the perpetrators of (radical) evil? And what can be the role of forgiveness and reconciliation?

Comprised of seven chapters, the book showcases a great philosophical and theoretical richness, and its subtopics head in many different directions. Throughout her arguments, La Caze exposes her clear roots in philosophical discourse. Consequently, *Wonder and Generosity* is the result of intense engagement with key philosophers of the past and present, such as Descartes, Kant, Irigaray, Arendt, and Derrida. La Caze eclectically engages with these authors by taking from them what she finds useful and leaving the rest behind. The book can be divided into roughly two parts with one bridge-like chapter in the middle. In the first three chapters, La Caze analyzes the passions that she thinks have the potential to be cultivated and to become virtues in the face of difference: the three main ones are wonder, generosity, and love. She then discusses the relation between sexual differences and other differences between human beings (59) in the third chapter, focusing mainly on the topic of race in comparison to sexual difference.

These first three chapters all hint toward the entanglement of ethics and politics in resolving problems and overcoming obstacles caused by a destructive approach to difference. To further clarify this mutual implication, the fourth chapter is devoted to understanding the relation between ethics and politics and argues that political conditions "should enable an ethical politics or make it more likely that wonder, generosity, and love will thrive" (7). This "ethical politics" is put to the test in the last three chapters, which discuss concrete problems concerning the treatment of refugees, the possibility of wonder and generosity in the face of radical evil, the difficulties of forgiveness, as well as the duty to apologize in processes of reconciliation.

The first chapter, "Wonder and Generosity," elaborates La Caze's enhancements of Irigaray's theory of wonder. Here, La Caze draws on insights from Descartes as well as Irigaray to arrive at her own notion of wonder that has the potential to rework the relation between those who differ, and to take others "as they are" leading, together with "generosity," to an appreciation of the other's qualities (19). As La Caze recalls, for Descartes wonder arises when we first encounter something rare or extraordinary, without judging it to be good or evil (13). With Irigaray's reworking of Descartes, however, wonder takes on a more distinctly ethical and intersubjective dimension. Here it provides a model for the way in which the two fundamentally sexed subjects--man and woman--should relate to each other (16). Now more a mode of relating than a way to acquire knowledge, wonder entails a desire for what we do not fully understand (17) and, for Irigaray, can actually lead to appreciation of the qualities of the sexed other.

La Caze sees a lot of potential in this approach to wonder, but argues that wonder as a mode of relating could and should be broadened to include all kinds of differences, including race and class as well as sex. Furthermore, in reviewing Descartes's and Irigaray's take on the matter, she argues that wonder cannot both be prior to judgment, as Descartes's *Passions of the Soul* [1649] suggests, and at the same time involve the attraction to and respect for the other that we see in Irigaray's reworking of Cartesian wonder (23). It is at this point that La Caze points out the limits of wonder *alone* and introduces the additional concept of generosity, also borrowed from Descartes, to clarify how "we can move beyond wonder to esteem and respect" (30) by respecting ourselves and others for our common capacity for freedom. Generosity can be seen as the converse of wonder, recognizing differences as an expression of similarity. In generosity, we esteem ourselves as well as others for having a free will that we can use for good or evil ends (26). So, in borrowing Cartesian generosity, La Caze asserts that in the recognition of a similar ground underlying our differences, we are able to respect others as we should respect ourselves.

Although La Caze's use of wonder and generosity is convincing, it may be considered disappointing that the hypothesis of the "free will," the fundamental presupposition on which this Cartesian concept of generosity is based, remains unquestioned throughout the book. A quick look at the literature on the existence of free will arguably should have encouraged the author to question this, or at least to acknowledge the fact that a will, free and consciously controlled by an "I," is the main premise that enables Cartesian generosity to bloom. It would be interesting to think about this: what would happen when the very ground of generosity--the free will debated even in Descartes's life--staggered or fell?

The second chapter, "Love and Respect," continues using these building blocks of wonder and generosity by introducing the concept of love. Combining views of Irigaray and Kant, La Caze argues in this chapter that an ethics of love does not have to entail the view that we must

love everyone, but that it should be taken seriously as a potentially transformative part of ethics and politics nevertheless.

Taking Kant's definition of practical love as a duty, love becomes a crucial factor in ethical life instead of merely a supplement (41). Kant himself does not take into account the obstacles that make love, as well as self-love, nearly impossible under oppressive conditions, but together with Irigaray, La Caze is able to leave us at a paradoxical conclusion that takes into account such hindrances to love. Asserting, on the one hand, that love can be cultivated and is not just an unnecessary extra to ethics, but is indeed able to transform oppressive conditions, she argues that, on the other hand, such love is also dependent on certain positive political conditions that allow love to flourish and transform oppressive political conditions in the first place. The transformative force of love, then, is dependent on political transformation itself.

Such productive paradoxes return in a different way in chapter 3, "Responding to Difference and Similarity," where La Caze convincingly shifts focus between often contested feminist equality arguments and feminist difference arguments. The question she asks here is how "wonder and generosity can enable understanding of a wide range of oppressions and how we should respond to them" (83). Using Toril Moi's reading of Simone de Beauvoir, she then asserts that oppression based on certain differences, such as racism and sexism, is not about paying attention to race or sex, but about "paying attention to it in the wrong way, at the wrong time in the wrong context" (83). Instead, La Caze persuasively argues for strategically foregrounding difference or equality when they *do* matter, and to do so in a way that does not silence or marginalize certain groups that differ from the norm. Oppression, then, should be responded to by respecting the humanity and thus similarity of all in being generous, whereas the differences existing among us should be regarded and responded to with wonder at the same time. In this way, La Caze does not do away with either of the two seemingly paradoxical feminist stances, but rather aims at making both equality and difference arguments work for instead of against us.

The strong and convincing course of the arguments in these first three chapters notwithstanding, it should be noted that La Caze restricts herself solely to interhuman differences. She thereby somewhat weakens the promise of the book and bypasses a contemporary body of cutting-edge theory across the fields of new materialism and eco-feminism. This more recent scholarship takes into account some of the biggest concerns of our present time, including the way we treat other animate creatures and how we choose to relate to our inanimate environments. Instead of radically opening up the question of "others" to its full potential and including humans and nonhumans alike in the question of ethical relating, La Caze's anthropocentric treatment of differences *exclusively* between humans fails to take into account the way in which relating not only to each other, but to the world we live in, is implied in creating an ethics that can fully change the way we relate to differences.

Instead of tackling these questions of relating to nonhuman others, La Caze further explores "The Relation between Ethics and Politics." This fourth chapter clarifies the jump from theoretical observations of the passions in the first three, to a concrete application of them in the final three chapters. Throughout this chapter, La Caze argues for an ethical politics in which ethics and politics are mutually implicated. Inspired by Kant's work, she herein argues for an expansion of the "realm of ethics into politics" (38) by creating the best conditions for ethical relations to ourselves and to others, and by allowing ethics to put constraints and limits on what should happen in politics (85). If we develop such an account of ethical politics infused with ethical considerations, she argues, wonder, generosity, but also Derridean

hospitality and forgiveness could flourish.

Having prepared the jump from "theory" to "practice," the second part of the book is concerned with more concrete answers to ethico-political questions and problems cutting across the entangled fields of ethics and politics as established in chapter 4. However, as expected, this does not include a discussion of problems concerning the relation between humans and nonhumans, although the concretization of ethics into politics *could* have paved the way to ethical relations beyond the interhuman. Instead, La Caze eloquently tackles a wide range of ethical issues concerning oppressed (human) groups--including asylum-seeker politics and indigenous peoples--problems concerning official apologies, responses to radical evil, and the question of gender equality.

Chapter 5, "Cosmopolitanism, Hospitality, and Refugees," deals with the well-known difficulties asylum-seekers and refugees face. Thinking about this through the concepts of hospitality and cosmopolitanism with Kant, Derrida, and Arendt, which both flow from and are an extension of generosity, wonder, and love (133), La Caze explores the potential and limits of hospitality and justifiably argues for an expansion of the legal category of "refugee" to include "persecution because of sexual orientation, expulsion from the country one is a citizen of, stateless people who are expelled from a country and those fleeing famine" (129-30). She also argues for special rights for asylum-seekers and refugees (131) that allow them to contribute to political life (132), something that is currently hindered by the practice of "holding asylum seekers in prisons, airports and detention centers for long periods of time" (132).

Chapter 6, "Wonder, Radical Evil, and Forgiveness" deals with the question of what to do with wonder and generosity in the face of radical evil and what the role could be of forgiveness therein. After a discussion of Arendt's account of radical evil, and Derrida's and Jankélévitch's views on forgiveness as either unconditional or conditional, La Caze argues that there is a "private space for private decisions concerning whether or not and when to forgive" (151). As we cannot *expect* forgiveness, La Caze asserts that we can only hope for it and try to bring about its conditions in practicing repentance, atoning, and making reparations (158).

The final chapter, "Apology, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation" also reflects this pragmatic approach in considering the questions that follow official apologies for wrongdoings. La Caze challenges the manifold objections to these official apologies and argues that they are obligatory and valuable in some cases, linking them back to wonder and generosity. She argues that apologies, as premised on general responsibility, and not on collective guilt (172, 173) are important steps in reconciliation processes and are an act of generosity in which one shows respect for others and their sufferings, as well as wonder in recognizing the distinct positions of oppressed others in the past and present (169). Contrary to forgiveness, which is based on love and is something we can only hope for, La Caze states that apologies are duty-based and believes they provide a context for genuine reconciliation.

Each of these final chapters aims to demonstrate how wonder and generosity (as well as other related passions) can lead to ethical responses to some of the most complicated ethico-political problems of our time. Yet, as mentioned earlier, the book suffers from an anthropocentric bias, assumes "free will," and lacks recognition of the nonhuman scope in today's ethical and political concerns. Therefore, La Caze's account of the aforementioned concepts is not truly satisfying. For the development of such an account in the future,

however, La Caze opens up a space to further explore the role and use of wonder and generosity in ethics and politics.

Undoubtedly, this book provides rich materials for those interested in ethics and the role of the passions. It should be of particular interest for students and scholars in (feminist) philosophy, gender studies, and the humanities. *Wonder and Generosity* provides a strong incentive to continue fine-tuning our conceptual tools, broadening our understanding of wonder and generosity, and finding new ways of working with their transformative potential.