# What we morally ought to do to help the world's badly-off

An account of moral responsibility on the brink of realism and idealism

*"In a world gradually expanding, humanity appears increasingly reclusive"* – Menno Mennes, 2016

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## 1. Introduction

"The lives of millions of people depend on our collective ability to act. In our world of plenty, there is no excuse for inaction or indifference. We have heard the alerts. Now there is no time to lose." This is what Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres urged on the 22th of February 2017 while pleading for the world to shift its gaze to the over 20 million starving people in South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and north-east Nigeria. The Secretary could very well have continued: "It is not beyond the capacity of the richer nations to give enough assistance to reduce any further suffering to very small proportions. The decisions and actions of human beings can prevent this kind of suffering." Suiting as it is, this second quote I borrowed from Peter Singer's 1972 influential and inspirational essay *Famine, affluence, and morality*.

It is apparent that even though global society has become ever more connected over the past fifty years, most of its people still display a rather negligent attitude to those living under dire circumstances. When writing his article, Singer too had no illusions that such attitudes would change any time soon. He defended his argument against the common view that, since I am just one of many people able to alleviate global poverty, I can only be hold responsible to a very negligent extent. Even more, if others are also failing to undertake any action, why would I have to feel guilty about my own failure to do so? It would have been different if my actions are the sole determinant of whether others live in poverty – but clearly they are not. Singer argues, though, "that there is a *psychological* difference between the cases; one feels less guilty about doing nothing if one can point to others, similarly placed, who have also done nothing. Yet this can make no real difference to our *moral obligations*." He continues:

> "Should I consider that I am less obliged to pull [a] drowning child out of the pond if on looking around I see other people, no further away than I am, who have also noticed the child but are doing nothing? One has only to ask this question to see the absurdity of the view that numbers lessen obligation. It is a view that is an ideal *excuse* for inactivity; unfortunately most of the major evils – poverty, overpopulation, pollution – are problems in which everyone is almost equally evolved (Singer 1972, 838, emphasis added).

I very much admire the position Singer is taking here and – undoubtedly together with many others – cannot say that I do not feel inspired by his essay. Yet, I also think that there is a disguised flaw in his argument, a flaw which makes that I disagree with Singer's overdemanding conclusion that "if it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything else morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it" (Singer, 836). In reaching this conclusion, I think Singer fails to adequately distinguish between what human behavior is, and what human behavior ought to be like. Although, Singer does point out that there is an important difference between what humans are psychologically likely to do and what our moral obligations are, by making

this distinction he fails to take into account that what people ought to do is necessarily derived from what they are both physically and psychologically able to do. Even more, by arguing for such stringent individual moral obligations, I think Singer is contributing to the problem that he is trying to solve. By confronting individuals with overly demanding obligations, I think he is only assisting the individual psychological tendency to find excuses for inactivity.

In this thesis my aim is to argue for a different conception of moral remedial responsibility for alleviating the world's plights. One that I think is sufficiently consistent with human nature, while also being satisfactorily idealistic in requiring changes in our current behavior that – potentially – have far-reaching consequences. In contrast to Singer, I will argue that psychological differences do affect our moral obligations. My main concern here is to discuss the relation between what is known as coping behavior and individual remedial responsibility. I hope that by discussing the nature of coping behavior, and how it affects individual motivational ability for action, I can show that it is important for theories of moral responsibility to take this essential feature of human nature into account when arguing for certain moral principles. Any moral principle that fails to be consistent with how humans actually tend to behave, I think is likely to be too idealistic, and cannot provide an adequate account of what we ought to do. Yet, as I will hope to show, this does not mean that all normativity is lost – on the contrary, I think that by focusing on what more realistically lies within human capacity, moral demands can eventually lead to great changes in that behavior. What is at stake here is not the defense of a general moral demand that perfectly describes all individual obligations with regards to remedial responsibility, but rather an attempt to provide principles that help us make sense of what we are morally required to do. By focusing on improving the moral system that functions as a guidepost for our moral principles, I think that morally valuable changes in human behavior will naturally arise.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. In chapter two I will argue for a conception of moral responsibility that is based on the twin pillars of awareness and capacity. In section 2.1 I will provide three conditions which I think can function as a guiding mechanism for a system of moral responsibility and finding the corresponding degree of individual moral accountability. The underlying assumption is that, only if we are able to change the course of our actions, can we be held morally accountable for doing so. In section 2.2 I will provide a positive account of why I think these three conditions are important in guiding our moral principles. I am mostly interested in the relation between our motivational ability to undertake certain actions, how they are affected by coping mechanisms, and the relation to moral obligations. Coping mechanisms are (often subconscious) mental processes that obscure the full significance of moral demands within the standpoint of our practical reason. The implication of such mechanisms is that it becomes harder for individuals to be motivated to undertake a certain action. My main argument here is that, upon becoming aware of moral demands, to the extent that our motivational ability to act upon such moral demands is hindered by coping mechanisms,

we face less stringent moral obligations as compared to when my motivational ability would not have been hindered by coping mechanisms. In section 2.3 I will provide an example that I think helps in clarifying this claim.

In section 2.4 I characterize the account I proposed in the previous sections as a theory of moral reason. My main aim in this section is to argue that moral responsibility only arises if individuals themselves are aware of certain moral demands. That is to say that I think that there are no moral demands existing outside of individual recognition which can render individuals morally responsible. This is not a claim about whether there is in fact an objective moral good or not – because no matter if there is or is not, such a demand can only affect individual accountability if individuals themselves are aware of it. In section 2.5 then, I will continue by considering the relation between individual awareness of moral demands and moral accountability. I will argue that, even if we assume that within theories of moral reason all individuals are equally capable of perceiving moral demands, this does not imply that we are all equally capable of acting upon those demands. There is an important difference between individual capacity to recognize a moral demand, and their actual ability to act upon this demand. Capacity considers the potential for action, whereas ability is the actual physical and cognitive capability of performing an action in the present. Based on differences in motivational abilities to act upon the awareness of moral demands in this section I side with Neo-Humeans in arguing that the moral authority of moral demands can be different for different individuals at different points in time – even if we accept the Kantian presupposition that all free and rational agents have an equal *capacity* for recognizing moral justifications. Correspondingly, I also think that differences in perceived moral authority come with differences in moral obligations. While individual capacity to recognize moral demands may be seen as equal, the capacity to act upon them is not.

In chapter three, I will continue to present the conception of moral responsibility elaborated on in section two, and link it to remedial responsibility specifically. In section 3.1 and 3.2 I will argue that current philosophical accounts focus too much on principles of justice when considering remedial responsibility. Although principles of justice do have an important role to play in allocating obligations for moral responsibility, I think they are insufficient for adequately making sense of our responsibility to provide aid to the faraway and needy. A moral account based on awareness and capacity is, I argue, able to fill this gap in our responsibilities. Moral remedial responsibility is not concerned with *allocating* responsibilities to individuals, but rather focuses on *evaluating* the acts and omissions by virtue of moral demands that individuals themselves are aware of. Based on the account developed in the second chapter, people with a lower motivational ability to take these moral demands into account in their actions, have a less stringent obligation to actually do so. The point is, however, that by morally requiring that all persons who are aware of a moral demand, need to continue considering the full significance of such moral demands in their deliberations, even while initially not actively acting upon

them, coping mechanisms can be countered. An important implication of this argument is that our future potential motivational ability to act upon moral demands will also increase.

By focusing on distributing obligations for remedial responsibility based on notions of causality, liability, or interdependence we cannot sufficiently require people to undertake actions that have far-reaching effects on the living circumstances of those whose human rights are generally deprived. Instead, by turning our attention to the system moral accountability, I believe we can gradually change people their perception of the moral demand to provide aid to others outside of their usual sphere of interests. Underlying this idea is the recognition of a basic minimal notion of humanity that we recognize in practically all human beings. The full significance of this common humanity in relation to moral demands is I think obscured by coping mechanisms, rendering people generally unable to act upon stringent moral remedial obligations. However, by accepting less stringent forms of moral responsibility at first, starting with feelings of shame and regret, moving to the need for spreading awareness, and only at last towards undertaking direct action, I think the significance which moral demands carry within the individual standpoint of practical reason increases. The self-strengthening effect is that the more significant the perception of these moral demands are, the greater individual capacity to act upon them becomes, the more stringent individual moral obligations will be. Instead of starting with an idealistic demand of what is morally required of people, this approach starts with what is realistically possible and ends up with idealistic normative claims.

### 2.1 An Account of Moral Responsibility: Three Conditions

In this section I wish to set up a positive account of moral responsibility that will function as a basis for considering remedial responsibility. Later on in this same chapter, I will contrast my account of moral responsibility against other such accounts. The key claim I am making here is that we cannot realistically assume that all individuals have an equal ability to act upon moral demands of which they themselves are aware. Coping mechanisms in the process of individual motivation hinder individuals in recognizing the full authority of moral demands within their standpoint of practical reason. Although individuals may be equally capable of recognizing the justifications of moral demands, they are not equally capable of acting upon of such demands once they have been recognized. This is important, because I think this also means that different individuals cannot be held morally responsible to similar degrees for comparable acts and omissions, since their capacity for having acted differently is not equal. For some individuals it may be easier to take moral demands into account as guides for their actions, while for others it may be harder. These differences among individuals, I will assume are not inherent psychological differences, but rather contingently dependent on the contextual influences that an individual has been subjected to.

Before further elaborating on these claims, it is first important to expand on what I mean by the two concepts that I think form the basis of the conception of moral responsibility I am proposing: the twin pillars of awareness and capacity. In relation to moral responsibility, awareness I take to be the state or quality of being conscious of a moral demand. Regardless of how such awareness came to be, the state of becoming aware signifies the moment after which a moral demand is recognized by an individual's cognitive mental processes. Here, I take awareness to be a static phenomenon, which one either is or is not over different points in time. You may also have a more gradual conception of awareness, according to which awareness is seen as constantly influenced by both affective and cognitive mental processes. Such a conception, I think, also suits within the account of moral responsibility I am developing here. What is important is not that awareness is brought about through cognition alone, but that there is a distinctive moment after which individuals become *sufficiently* aware of moral demands in order to be held morally accountable – regardless of whether affective mental processes are still influencing this tentative state of mind. This distinctive moment occurs when the awareness of a moral demand gives an individual *a* reason for action within the standpoint of her practical deliberation. The fact that an individual herself recognizes *some* authority of a moral demand, renders her minimally obligated to take this moral demand into account when performing her actions. Morally speaking, I think this moment is reached when the following two conditions are met:

1. An individual becomes aware of a certain moral principle that functions as a constraint on the range of acts and omissions that she can perform/not perform morally speaking.
2. An individual becomes aware of the morally relevant state of affairs that provide her with a reason to take this moral principle (as it is recognized in condition 1) into account.

To meet these two conditions, it is irrelevant whether we regard the moral principles that individuals become aware of as principles which are in themselves objectively true. Regardless of whether they are or are not, only after an individual herself recognizes a moral principle does she become accountable for acting or not acting upon this principle. The main reason is that a person can only be held morally accountable if it is fair to do so. Whether the actions of agents are desirable in itself is not something that can make somebody morally accountable, except if she herself is aware of such a desirability. This claim will be further expanded on in section 2.4 when discussing theories of moral standards.

The conception of capacity I am interested in here, considers the motivational ability – the ability to be motivated towards a specific goal - that individuals have for fulfilling a moral demand. This already assumes that a (moral) goal is sufficiently significant for an individual to provide *a* reason for action, and hence that an individual is aware of a specific goal, but it does not necessarily follow that

she has *most* reason to pursue the goal from the standpoint of her practical reason. Capacity is thus the scope of potential actions that a person can undertake. If her motivational ability is greater, than her capacity also becomes greater, because the likelihood of undertaking a specific action increases compared to the likelihood of undertaking other actions. As I see it, when considering a person her motivational ability, we are focusing on her cognitive capability to perform a specific action at a certain point in time. Yet, when we are considering her capacity for performing that same action, we need to compare her cognitive ability to perform that action to all other plans for action she has in mind. In this sense, even if one may have ample cognitive *ability* to do *X*, if one rather performs actions *Y* and *Z* first, the ability to *X* may go hand in hand with a relatively small *capacity* to *X*. Where ability signifies the actual physical and cognitive capability an individual has to perform a certain action, capacity signifies the *potential* one has for performing an action. Although in this thesis it is assumed that all individuals have an equal *a priori* cognitive capacity for recognizing moral justifications by virtue of their common rationality, I argue, not all individuals have an equal cognitive ability act upon those justifications over time. I personally prefer the more empirical claim that most people generally have an equal capacity for recognizing moral justifications, yet my goal here is to show that even on the Kantian idea that we have this capacity by virtue of being free and rational agents, it does not follow that we have equal moral obligations. While the ability to recognize the full authority of moral justifications may be obscured by coping mechanisms, the motivational ability of an individual to act towards a certain goal is dependent on the relation which this goal has to the other conscious and subconscious interests an individual has. Focusing on motivational ability, for example, if a goal carries more weight within the standpoint of one's practical reason, an individual has a greater capacity for acting towards achieving this goal. If it carries less weight, an individual has a lesser capacity to act towards this goal. When a goal is in itself morally relevant, I think that from such a greater or lesser capacity to act towards such a goal, it also follows that individuals can have more stringent or more relaxed moral obligations to perform actions towards that goal. Moral accountability is thus also limited by this third constraint:

3. It is within an individual's capacity to have acted otherwise, where the degree of moral obligations positively correlates to both the degree of motivational and physical ability individuals have for acting morally.

It is thus possible for me to be morally responsible to a greater extent for failing to undertake a certain action, if the motivation I have for undertaking this action is greater than it is for another individual, even if we both fail to undertake the same action. I would now first like to provide a more positive account for explaining why I think there are differences in moral obligations for similar acts and

omissions, whereas later, in sections 2.4 and 2.5, I will defend this argument against possible objections.

### 2.2 Moral Responsibility and Coping Mechanisms

The variety in moral obligations that individuals have for acting towards a moral goal is based upon the idea that in order for individuals to be morally accountable, they must simultaneously be aware of the moral nature of their acts and omissions, while it must also lie within their capacity to perform differently. Let me emphasize here that the capacity to perform differently, is a different capacity than the capacity to become aware of a moral demand in the first place. While awareness is quality assumed to be static, the capacity to perform differently is, a quality which differs among different individuals at different points in time. To support this claim, I heavily rely on a psychological account of the process of motivation provided by Menno Mennes.

In his *De Theatro Motivarum*, Mennes (2016) provides a theoretical model for the process of motivation. Regrettably, this theory is far too extensive to fully discuss adequately within the scope of this thesis. Yet, I do think that by referring to some of its components, this theory of motivation can function as a helpful guide for elaborating on the claims about moral responsibility I have been making so far.

Mennes regards the process of motivation as consisting of multiple psychological phases that follow each other in sequential order (see Fig. 1). Going through these phases, an individual is constantly appraising the goal that she aims at achieving against internal and external influences. Through the investment of effort and the confrontation with interferences from an external reality, individuals reassess the position of a certain (moral) goal within their standpoint of practical reason. After having invested effort and being confronted with the impact of an interfering external reality, individuals return to the phase of expectancies, in which the person adjusts the expectations set out initially to anticipate better for an interfering reality.

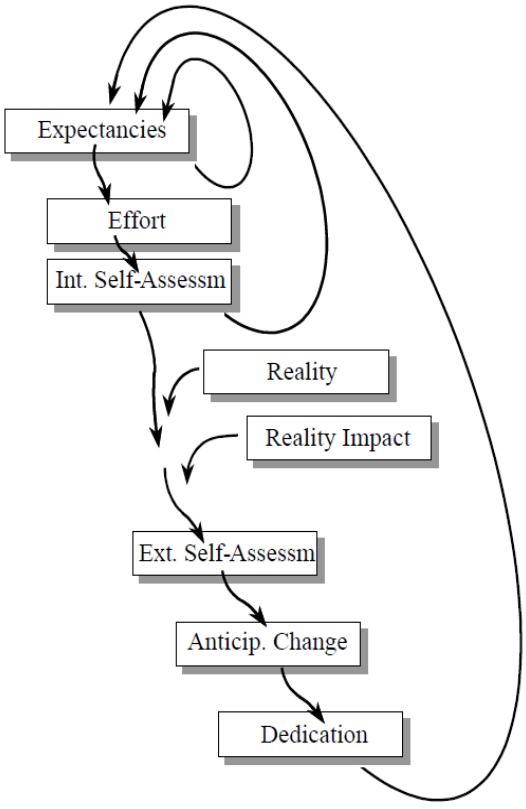


Fig 1. A visualized overview of the eight phases in the theoretical model of motivation (Mennes 2016, 28)

Mennes points out “that a second motivational cycle starts with two intentions in mind: (1) to further enhance the influence of reality when its impact is perceived as positive to the process of motivation, [or] to reduce the influence of reality when its impact is perceived as negative” (2016, 35). This second cycle in the process of motivation thus helps individuals in dealing with an interfering reality when that reality makes it harder to achieve the goal that was set out in this first place. Often it may turn out harder to achieve an objective we initially set out to do during our first phase of expectancies, which leads us to adjust our expectancies in a second cycle of the process of motivation. Either we change the goal we initially hoped to achieve itself, or we change the amount of effort we are willing to invest in achieving this goal and the corresponding rewards that such an achievement would give us; “in the process of motivation, then, there appears to be a covering up, a hiding of true intentions in order to prevent failure and frustration” (Mennes 2016, 37). It may be helpful to further quote Mennes at large here:

> Motivation is assumed to be an ‘inner dialogue’, a Process, largely evaluative in nature, evolving around an objective the individual seeks to achieve. Assessments are made regulating activities aimed at reaching the objective. In this process, the individual is confronted with outside interferences defined as ‘reality’. Surprisingly, instead of integrating these new perspectives from reality the individuals seems to change reality, neutralizing its input when its effects are perceived as negative, and emphasizing its input when effects are positive, thus preserving and securing the objective against these interferences. The more significant the objective initially set, the more these protective mechanisms apply (Mennes 2016, 38).

The individual tendency to neutralize the interference from reality is referred to as coping behavior. Mennes has emphasized that this coping behavior often occurs subconsciously, but nevertheless is something which individuals can also become cognitively aware of. I assume that to the degree that I am consciously aware of a moral demand, it is to a certain degree within my motivational ability to act upon this moral demand. Even in situations where I perceive to have no other choice than to perform an action which by itself neglects a moral demand, it is still within my ability to perform this action while feeling a sense of regret or shame. I may not have the motivational ability to act differently, but I do have the ability to dislike the action that I am performing; “acting” in this sense is interpreted broadly, where besides physical actions it also signifies mental actions. Even though coping mechanisms may obscure the full significance of a moral demand, it may still be within an individual’s minimal capacity to take a moral demand into account in performing her acts and omissions. By being minimally able to take these demands into account, I still have an obligation to undertake those (mental) actions that may counter my coping behavior and in time provide me with more reason to act towards the moral demand. One important way through which I can do this, is by simply accepting my own current motivational inability to act upon a moral demand, while continuing to recognize the significance of that demand. This will lead me to take the – perhaps frustrating and confronting – reality

into account, and may lead to a greater ability to act upon this demand in the future. If, on the other hand, coping mechanisms continue to obscure the significance of moral demands, not only does it remain outside of my ability to act upon them, but it also further decreases my capacity, my potential for future action, for acting upon them.

Without actively trying to recognize the full significance to act towards a certain moral goal, coping mechanisms will continue to obscure this moral goal and my awareness of the moral nature of my actions. Coping is a mechanism which changes how reality is represented to an individual and how willing an individual is to work towards a certain goal and what she thinks will be the reward for achieving this goal. In this sense, coping behavior takes place right on the psychological edge of how individuals realistically behave and how they might ideally behave. If it is indeed true that it is human nature to cover up our true intentions, this seems to be exactly the mental practice which explains why there is still a huge discrepancy between what we often think we ought to do, and the things we actually do.

I think these claims have normative importance, because they explain why some think moral principles are decisively significant in guiding our actions, others perceive them to be unrealistically demanding – even impossible to consistently follow. What I think Mennes shows is that such a discrepancy may be the results of subconscious coping mechanisms. To the extent that it is, I think this has implications for what we can require of individuals that they ought to do. If I am perceiving a moral demand as something which I am practically unable to do, it is barely within my capacity to take this demand into account as a guide for my actions. Correspondingly, it is only fair to blame me for my acts and omissions to the extent that it could be reasonably expected that I would have indeed acted differently. I cannot be blamed to the same extent for failing to take a moral demand into account, as is somebody who is much more motivated to follow a similar moral demand.

Moral demands recognized by an individual as providing *a* reason for action are likely to be concealed by coping mechanisms because she is confronted with a reality which makes it hard for her to act upon these demands. The authority of moral demands, in this sense, is similar to the significance of objectives that Mennes discusses. The more authority a moral demand carries for an individual, the stronger will coping mechanisms try to conceal this objective to the individual when she is faced with a reality that obstructs her from complying to the moral demand. On the one hand, this means that it is within our capacity to act upon these moral demands. If we would not have this capacity, we would not regard the moral demand as a somewhat authoritative and significant goal in the first place. Yet on the other, if the capacity to act upon moral demands is obstructed by coping behavior, it becomes increasingly harder to act upon these demands, for their initial significance will be concealed and covered up, thereby decreasing the weight they carry within the standpoint of one's practical reason.

It follows from this account that those persons who have highly effective coping mechanisms

have a very low capacity to act upon a moral demand, and thereby can barely be morally obligated to undertake specific actions towards a moral demand. Although I think this is an aspect of my argument which seems counter-intuitive, I do think it is one that we need to accept. I will further elaborate on why I think so in sections 2.4 and 2.5, but the main argument is that we cannot base more responsibility in what seems *desirable* to expect from people in them performing certain acts and omissions. Besides, I think that the power of less stringent moral obligations may generally be underestimated. One implication of the argument I am developing in this thesis is that by posing relatively relaxed moral obligations on people who have a lower capacity for acting towards certain moral demands, the likelihood that a person will undertake some action towards a moral demand increases. The underlying idea is that, when many individuals accept less stringent moral obligations such as feelings of regret or shame, such feelings will resonate through society, and thereby change the 'external reality' that obstructed the initial process of individual motivation. Consequently, I think, individual capacity to act towards a moral demand increases, and more stringent moral obligations can be posed. I conjecture that a further obligation, for example, could be the obligation to spread awareness of a moral demand, without oneself having to actually undertake direct action. Undertaking direct action towards fulfilling a moral demand is one of the most stringent obligations of moral responsibility, and it can only be required of individuals to undertake such actions once their ability to do so carries sufficient authority within their standpoint of practical reason.

### 2.3 An Example: Eating Meat

Before defending this account against possible objections, I would first like to further elaborate on the above claims with an example: that of eating meat. For the sake of argument I simply assume that there is a moral demand on people to eat less meat. It may also be argued that it is the slaughtering process (which often is quite cruel) that is morally wrong, yet for the sake of simplicity I assume that killing animals in itself is wrong. Most people seem to be aware of this moral objection to eating meat, yet do not consider the moral weight of this demand as sufficient to actually motivate them towards action. People often resort to arguments along the following lines; "whether I eat meat or not, my individual decision does not affect the number of animals killed by the meat industry. So I might as well." Or, "humans have been eating meat for as long as they have been around, so why should I be morally required to change my eating patterns?" It are precisely such views and arguments that I think are expressions of coping mechanisms. Individuals may still think that it is a significant moral goal not to kill animals, but change their anticipation towards achieving this goal and their representation of the goal itself in order to cope with the complex and rather overwhelming reality that makes it hard

for most people to stop eating meat.

Such arguments obscure the moral discussion we should be having instead. The question at stake is not "does my individual consumption affect overall meat consumption?" or "why should I be the one who stops eating meat?" Instead, we should focus on the question "to what extent is it within my motivational and physical capacity to contribute to the stopping of killing animals for our meat consumption?" The answer to such a question is not as clear-cut as the answers one anticipates when considering questions that misrepresent the actual problem. One of the key reasons for this ambiguity is that each individual has different motivational abilities in confronting complex issues. Nevertheless, by shifting focus to the actual issue at hand, individuals become better able to recognize the full moral authority of moral demands, and thereby increase their own capacity to act upon their moral responsibilities in a world that is in fact much more complex than we often like to imagine. If everyone started feeling a sense of shame or frustration when eating meat, even if initially we do not undertake any actions that actually address the issue of eating meat, such a shared feeling of shame is likely to make it easier for most people to eat less meat in the future (or, for some, to stop eating meat at all). In a sense, the external reality one faces when confronted with the moral demand to stop eating meat changes, because for example people in your immediate surroundings at large accept negative feelings towards the eating of meat. It is by accepting lesser moral obligations at first, that we become able to address larger moral issues at a later stage.

Let me emphasize here again that acting upon moral demands is a cyclical process that is open to constant reevaluation of the significance of moral claims and individual capacity to act upon these claims. Together with the idea that morality is a matter of degrees, this implies that upon realizing a certain moral demand (e.g. the responsibility to stop eating meat), at first an individual her moral responsibility to fulfill this demand may be quite undemanding. Although to stop eating meat becomes an individual's goal, confronted with a reality that is interfering with this goal, one's initial capacity to pursue this goal may be rather low. Not only may there still be a strong affective desire to eat meat, but one's social position in a society in which the eating of meat is normalized effectively decrease individual motivational ability to stop eating meat. Nevertheless, upon realizing the moral wrongness of eating meat, individuals have *some* responsibility to fulfil this moral demand. Accepting a feeling of shame, for example, whenever eating a piece of meat, could be sufficient to fulfil one's initial moral responsibility. While it may not be fair to expect that, upon becoming aware of the moral blameworthiness, of eating meat somebody immediately stops eating meat altogether, it may be fair to expect that she accepts feelings of shame the next time she eats a piece of meat. The implication connected to this view is that, over time, such relatively minor demands (compare feeling ashamed to stop eating meat at all), I think will have greater effects in effectively addressing moral issues in the longer run. It is important to realize at this point, that there is no shame in feeling ashamed. Both

physical and mental incapability is something we see everywhere around us, yet it appears that we are much more reluctant to accept our mental incapabilities.

Instead of making idealistic claims about how people might be, the approach developed so far takes people as they are. I assume that individuals are aware of many moral principles. It is, however, because adhering to such moral principles is a difficult thing to do for most individuals from the standpoint of their individual practical reason, that we tend to conceal the full significance and authority of these demands. Individuals thus need to discover the full moral authority that moral demands carry with them. Claims that all free and rational individuals are simply able to directly act (in the narrow sense) upon moral demands are only counterproductive to such a goal, because a person confronted with such claims will only be more likely to resort to coping mechanisms when her current motivational ability is insufficient to undertake physical actions. Instead, by lowering the moral demands that are made upon a person failing to live up to moral demands, she will take this less demanding reality into account in a new cycle of her motivation process and become more likely to invest some effort towards fulfilling a moral demand. Such effort does not necessarily have to take the form of a physical action, but can also manifest itself in accepting feelings of shame, regretting the undertaking of an action, or simply by spending more time deliberating on the moral nature of the act or omission related to the moral demand. Such an act may in fact be the start of a process that will only make a person increasingly more motivated to contribute to the moral demand, and thereby render her more able to offset more stringent moral obligations.

At this point, many readers are likely to criticize the account of moral responsibility I have been developing as not being sufficiently demanding. How can we make sense of instances in which people with highly effective coping mechanisms undertake spiteful and cruel actions? Is it not unfair to hold them morally responsible to a lesser degree as compared to people who fail to comply to a less stringent moral demand, but whom are better aware of the moral nature of their actions? In order to defend the account of moral responsibility elaborated on in these first three sections against such objections, I will now focus on providing support for the claims I have been making by comparing them to other accounts of morality. First, It is helpful to designate my account as a theory of moral reason, and differentiate it from theories of moral standards. According to theories of moral reason, individuals are morally accountable for moral demands because they are aware of these demands, and not because it is desirable that they act in a specific manner.

### 2.4 Moral Demands

In this section I will focus on the question when individuals can be regarded as morally accountable in specific. Becoming morally accountable implies that we become morally answerable for our acts and omissions. When morally accountable, the things we do or not do are open to moral blame. As I have claimed, the qualifier for becoming morally accountable is awareness. It is by becoming aware of the moral nature of your actions, that you become minimally accountable for moral demands. In basing my conception of moral accountability on the notion of awareness, I am referring to the mental state of becoming conscious of (1) a moral principle and (2) the corresponding morally relevant state of affairs. These two qualities were specified as the first two conditions of moral responsibility in the first section of this chapter. In order to make an assessment on the degree of moral obligation, it is necessary to make a judgement about an individual's capacity to act upon her awareness of a moral demand. To fully understand this, it is however first necessary to elaborate on why awareness functions as the first necessary and minimally sufficient marking point for moral accountability. Why is it that only when individuals are aware of the moral nature of their actions that they become morally accountable?

The discussion on moral accountability can be nicely situated within two different types of theories. Paul Hurley has referred to these different styles of theorizing as theories of moral standards on the one hand, and theories of moral reasons on the other (2011, 36–46). The key difference between these two theories is that the latter, theories of moral reasons, are based upon accounts of individual reason, whereas the former are not. Theories of moral standards propose a distinctive account of a moral demand, which then is presupposed to function as an evaluative mechanism for the moral nature of a person's acts or omissions. Although this moral demand may refer to individual reason, and argue that individuals practically cannot deny the truth of this principle, theories of moral standards justify themselves in the purported objective truth of these principles, and not in the subjective perception and capability of individuals. In this section I will argue against theories of moral standards, and argue that moral accountability must exclusively be grounded in individual awareness.

To better grasp this difference between moral standards and a theory of moral reason, it is helpful to draw on Williams his account of internal and external reasons (1981). Williams argues that "basically, and by definition, any model for the internal interpretation [of reasons] must display a relativity of the reason statement to the agent's *subjective motivational set*" (Williams 1981, 60). This is to say that we can only think someone has a reason to do something, if the agent herself recognizes this reason as something she is motivated to do within her standpoint of practical reason. External reasons, on the other hand, are reasons for undertaking an action which exist outside of the reference to any individual's motivation for undertaking that action. For example, it does not seem absurd if

someone objects to Williams by saying that there is an external reason I should send my mother flowers on her birthday, regardless of me having an internal reason for doing so or not. There seems to be an objective principle that loving and caring mothers should be spoiled and thought about on their birthdays, which explains why I have an external reason to send my mother a bouquet of roses, regardless of whether I actually feel motivated to do so or not.

Williams thinks, however, that there cannot be any such reasons for me to undertake an action without me being motivated to undertake that action. And if I have no apparent reason to undertake a certain action, it lies outside my capacity to undertake that action, and therefore I cannot be morally obligated to undertake that action. It may be helpful to quote Williams at large here:

> The whole point of external reason statements is that they can be true independently of the agent's motivations. But nothing can explain an agent's (intentional) actions except something that motivates him to act. So something else is needed besides the truth of the external reason statement to explain action, some psychological link; and that psychological link would seem to be *belief*. A's believing an external reason statement about himself may help to explain his action

What Williams is saying here, is that an external reason (or moral standard) cannot explain a person's action, if that person itself is not aware of - does not belief, in his words, - such a reason. I am likely to think, for example, that it is true that all caring mothers should be send flowers on their birthday, and therefore that I am morally accountable for having forgotten to do so. However, the reason why I am morally accountable is that based on the recognition that there is a reason to send my mother flowers on her birthday I am at least minimally motivated to do so, by virtue of which it lies within my capacity to do so. However, since I assume that for individuals to be morally accountable, it must have been possible for them to have acted differently, my account differs from William's in that I think people can only be motived to act upon a *moral* demand when they recognize (as in are aware of) the moral nature of that demand. Whereas I may be subconsciously motivated towards acting in opposition to a moral demand, as long as I am not aware of this demand, I am unable to change my course of actions, and therefore can also not be blamed for failing to do so. I thus think that, in relation to moral demands, we need to add a further requirement on William's account of internal reasons; namely that besides being motivated for doing *X*, in order for this action to be morally relevant, the motivation for doing *X* must stem from my awareness of a moral demand relevant to *X*'ing.

For example, if my brother would walk up to me and blame me for my forgetfulness in sending my mother some birthday flowers, he is implicitly assuming that I am aware of an internal reason for doing so, and that therefore I should be blamed. Yet still, it is not the fact that I forgot my mother her birthday in itself which makes me morally accountable, but my awareness of the moral principle and the corresponding regrettable moral nature of my omission. Regardless of whether we conceive of awareness as purely cognitive, or as also influenced by affective subconscious reasons for action, what

is at stake here is that there can only be morally relevant reasons to act when such reasons are recognized by an individual herself, thereby making an individual motivated towards such reasons. If this holds, only awareness of a moral demand renders it within an individual her capacity to act upon this demand and makes her morally accountable. In this sense, I thus regard awareness as a necessary condition for the assertibility of a moral claim.

Oppositely, philosophers advocating theories of moral standards are likely to object that the way individuals perceive things to be, from a moral perspective, cannot affect the nature of the moral demands to which they are accountable. Some utilitarian theorists, for example, think that there is a single objective state of affairs which is the optimal outcome from a moral point of view. Moral evaluation of a person's acts and omissions, then, is based on their contribution to this optimal state of affairs. All actions that obstruct the preferred optimal state of affairs are regarded as morally blameworthy. Such theories have intuitive appeal because they emphasize the actions that individuals *ought to* undertake, regardless of whether they themselves are aware of such demands. There is thus always a moral demand upon all individuals to strive for achieving the moral optimal outcome. A often mentioned critique of such utilitarian theories, though, is that they are too demanding.

Peter Singer (also quoted in the introduction of this thesis) argues against to objection that utilitarian arguments are too demanding on individuals. Again, Singer argues that whenever "it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything else morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it" (1972, 836). Singer accepts that this moral demand would mean that every relatively well-off individual needs to drastically change their daily activities in order to live a morally praiseworthy life. He emphasizes that how things currently are should in no way affect how they actually should be. Liam Murphy, on the other hand, criticizes such a demand by arguing that it has no intuitive appeal. As he puts it "the demands it makes strike just everyone as absurd—as we say, a principle that makes such demands 'just couldn't be right" (Murphy 2003).

There seemingly are thus two conflicting intuitive appeals inherent to utilitarianism and other theories of moral standards. On the one hand, it is appealing to think that there are certain things we ought to do regardless of our awareness of and motivation towards such a demand. Whereas, on the other, it seems rather absurd to expect individuals to account for every single act or omission that they may have done or not done in a morally better way. I think it is important to take away from Singer's utilitarian defense of moral standards that the mere fact that a moral theory is demanding a drastic change in our everyday behavior, does not imply that it cannot be morally demanded that we ought to drastically change this behavior. My objection to Singer, however, is that such drastic changes can only be demanded if we are in fact aware of any reasons to do so. It may hence still be morally required that we drastically change our behavior, but individuals themselves only become accountable to such a moral demand when they themselves become aware of it. .

Yet, the demand on constant awareness of all moral demands and all corresponding morally relevant state of affairs is, I think, unable to be realistically consistent with human nature. Undoubtedly, there have been more than a few people, who, when confronted with the intuitive and logical force of Singer's arguments, in fact felt sufficiently motivated to make his principle an important guideline in their everyday decision-making. It is hard to think that such people are not living a morally praiseworthy live. Yet, I am less content to argue that this also implies that those generally failing to take Singer's principle into account, are necessarily living a morally blameworthy life.

The concept of moral blame itself means that the acts or omissions of individuals are regarded as blameworthy. My actions can only be blameworthy, however, if I am aware of the moral nature of those actions. Stephen Darwall (2006, 15) points this out by saying that "when we seek to hold people accountable, what matters is not whether doing so is desirable, either in a particular case or in general, but whether a person's conduct is culpable (…). Desirability is a reason *of the wrong kind* to warrant the attitude and actions in which holding someone responsible consist in their own terms." In order for a person to change her actions in a morally relevant way, the first requirement would be that she becomes aware of the moral nature of her acts and omissions. For example, the fact that I am morally accountable for alleviating the suffering of the poor and needy, as I will further focus on in the third chapter of this thesis, does not lie in the existence of this suffering itself, but rather in the fact that in some sense my acts and omissions can be blamed for failing to adequately address the existence of this suffering. Blaming me for this suffering is to say that you think I am aware of a reason to alleviate such suffering. If I would not have such a reason, it is unfair, morally speaking, to blame me for something of which I did not have any awareness that it was in fact blamable. It cannot logically be required from me that I have reason to bring about a better overall state of affairs, while at the same time I am not aware of such a reason, or of what this best outcome in fact is. Without fulfilling the two requirements of awareness I have no reason to change my acts and omissions in regards of a moral demand – and I cannot be blamed for not having such a reason.

But still, is it not plausible that someone objects that you *should have been* aware of the moral nature of a situation or of a moral principle? And that this in itself gives a reason for moral accountability. In the words of Wallace (1997, 324), "we think that agents who possess the powers of reflective self-control are morally accountable, because they are competent to grasp and comply with the justifications supporting moral demands." Furthermore, it is not unreasonable to claim that in our current globalized information society we are aware of many more morally relevant states of affairs than we are actually accounting for.

Claiming that I should have been aware of the moral nature of the circumstances, however, is a claim saying that one thinks that I am sufficiently *competent* to be aware of this state of affairs, and that therefore I am morally accountable for failing to act. In other words, you think that I already am

aware of a moral principle or state of affairs, or am aware of an internal reason for becoming aware of a certain state of affairs or a moral principle; you think that I think that I should know or do something. On my part, however, this raises the requirement that I am in fact aware of such circumstances or principles, or that I am aware of a reason to become more aware of them, in the first place. Hence, it still follows from this objection that individuals become morally accountable only after they become aware of any reasons to comply to moral demands. We may still think that it is unfair to hold somebody with highly effective coping mechanisms morally accountable as compared to someone with a better understanding of the full significance of a moral demand. Yet, we can only feel this way because we think the other agent was in fact sufficiently competent to grasp a moral demand, and therefore should have acted in a specific way. Without this awareness, it would be unfair to blame even the most gruesome type of actions, however desirable we may think this is.

When trying to make sense of the relation between individuals with highly effective coping mechanisms performing, for example, certain cruel atrocities and their moral responsibility, there are on my account two ways through which we can make sense of the intuitive appeal that they should be hold responsible, despite their own apparent inability to feel shame or regret. The first, as I have done so far, is too assume the Kantian claim that all individuals have a minimal capacity to recognize certain moral justifications in relation to some gruesome acts. When considering the killing of others, for example, we may assume that everyone can be blamed for undertaking such actions, since no matter how effective one's coping mechanisms are, anyone can be expected to be sufficiently aware of a moral demand not to kill. A second more controversial approach, yet the one that I favor, is to say that some people cannot be held morally accountable even for the most gruesome atrocities, if they were not aware of any moral demands in relation to the performance of those acts. It is important at the outset of this claim to note that even if someone may not be morally responsible for undertaking certain act, they can still be held responsible from the perspective of justice. In section 3.1 I will further elaborate on the difference between justice and morality in relation to remedial responsibility in specific. Let me now further explain why I think that some people may not be held morally responsibility, even when it seems extremely desirable to do so.

The main reason why, is that, however bizarre a person's behavior may seem, at the time of undertaking certain actions, those actions must have made sense to the person performing them given her own interests, beliefs, motivations, and situational position. Although it may be very hard to understand in hindsight, why someone acted in the way that she did, I think it is even more bizarre to think that someone acted in a way that she at the time of action is aware of is in fact an extremely atrocious action. This would be a type of irrational behavior that we usually attribute to people suffering from a psychosis, whose actions can also be regarded as not liable to moral blame. If somebody is completely unable to see why she should have acted otherwise, she cannot be blamed

for her actions, however desirable it may be. Let me emphasize again, however, that she can still be held accountable from a perspective of justice.

Strange as it may seem, I would briefly like to turn to safety research theory in order to illustrate why I think that this is. Sidney Dekker has described what he calls the 'new view on error and performance', which focuses on explaining "why people did what they did, rather than judging them for not doing what we now know they should have done" (2002, 372). Dekker argues that the tendency to attribute blame to agents prevents us from investigating what factors may have led to an agent acting in the way that she did. He argues:

> "The rationale is that human error is not an explanation for failure, but instead demands an explanation; and that effective countermeasures start not with individual human beings (…), but rather with the error-producing conditions present in their working environment. (…) When confronted by failure, it is easy to retreat into the old view: seeking out the "bad apples" and assuming that with them gone, the system will be safer than before" (Dekker 2002, 372).

I think that the same tendency Dekker sees in assigning responsibility for failures in the workplace prevails in theories of moral standards when they try to assign moral responsibility to agents independent of their own awareness of that responsibility. Instead of assigning blame to an agent for performing the most evil acts, it would be more helpful to ask what made it possible for her to behave in this way in the first place. The answer to that question I am developing in this thesis it that coping mechanism can play a large part in obscuring the blameworthy nature of one's acts and omissions. Therefore, we need to think about how we can counter those coping mechanisms, change the moral system in which they operate, and thereby prevent the further occurrence of regrettable or blameworthy acts and omissions. We cannot do this by blaming people because we think it is desirable to do so. Rather, as I will further elaborate on in the next section, we need to focus on what is within our own capacity to work towards a better moral system.

So far, I have focused on defending the claim that individual awareness is the first necessary condition for becoming morally accountable. Yet, this alone tells us little about the nature of this awareness in relation to moral responsibility. The fact that individuals are aware of internal reasons to comply with a moral principle and that it would therefore be fair to hold them morally accountable does not tell us whether they have most reason to comply with such a principle. It follows that awareness alone is not the only quality affecting my capacity to act upon moral demands.

This last point is important, because even within theories of moral reason there is the danger of sketching a too idealistic image of how individuals should behave, and thereby failing to take into account how persons actually can behave. There is still the need for a trade-off between how people are, and how they might be. By simply assuming that it follows from moral accountability that it is morally blameworthy for persons to fail to live up to moral demands, we may still be failing to take

into account a sufficiently realistic picture of how persons actually are. In section 2.1 and 2.2 it was argued that coping mechanisms may function to obscure the full significance of a moral demand, even if individuals have at times been aware of such a demand. Moral demands can thus be perceived as having less significance within the standpoint of practical reason as they would have if coping mechanisms did not play a role. Dependent on the level of authority that awareness of a moral demand carries within the standpoint of practical reason, individuals may have a greater or lesser motivational ability to act upon such demands. I will further defend this claim in the next section.

### 2.5 Moral Authority

In this section I will focus on the question of how we can make sense of moral obligations in relation to individual's awareness of moral demands. The main discussion in relation to this question focuses on whether awareness of a moral principle and the morally relevant state of affairs alone provides sufficient authority within the standpoint of individual practical reason for allowing individuals to act upon these demands and circumstances. Or, in the words of Wallace, the question is whether an agent "has *most* reason to comply with moral demands, or whether such compliance is *optimal* from the standpoint of deliberative reason" (emphasis in original, 1997, 322). As I have already suggested, I do not think it necessarily is, and in this section I will further defend the claim that awareness alone is a necessary and minimally sufficient condition for moral accountability, but that the corresponding degree of moral obligations also correlates with the level of capacity that individuals have in acting upon moral demands.

The debate within theories of moral reason, as I see it, focuses on the extent to which the ability to grasp and comply with justifications for moral demands is hindered by affective mental processes, and to what extent this affects individual moral obligations. This discussion can, again, be divided among two styles of theorizing. On the one hand, there are Kantian theorists endorsing contractualist theories of moral reason, while on the other there are neo-Humean theorists arguing for more pluralist theories. Similarly to the debate between theories of moral standards and theories of moral reason, the debate among these two different theories of moral reason can also be situated in a desire to find the right balance between how people actually are and to what extent we can reasonably expect they might be.

On this scale of realism versus idealism, I think, if theories of moral standards take an idealistic position, Kantian contractualism takes an intermediate position. According to Kantians, it is recognized that people need to be aware of moral demands in order to be morally accountable, while at the same time maintaining that there are certain moral demands and self-evident truths of which it can

reasonably be expected that everyone is aware of them. Neo-Humean pluralists on the contrary, take a more realistic position, and emphasize that what people are aware of is historically and spatially contingent, largely dependent upon the context in which they are situated, and even determined by a person's particular character and the mood she finds herself in. Therefore the pluralist position entails that different people can be aware of different moral standards depending on the influences they have been exposed to. I will situate my account of moral responsibility between these two different types of theorizing, because I assume that there are indeed certain moral demands of which it can be expected that all individuals recognize them, yet I also think that such recognition provides different individuals with different moral obligations depending on its relation to an individual's motivational ability for acting towards this goal.

In providing an account for Kantian contractualism, Stephen Darwall points out that "it makes no sense to blame someone for doing something and then add that he had, nonetheless, sufficient reason to do it, all things considered" (2006, 28). If we think that it would have been better for an individual to act in another way, while we also accept that it made sense from the practical rational standpoint of the individual to act in the way she did, it would be unfair if we would continue to blame the person for his acts and omissions. Darwall argues for a view of moral responsibility based on what he refers to as the 'second-personal standpoint'. On this view, claims of moral demands are based in the mutual recognition of the authority of such claims. As was argued in the first section of this chapter, in order to make a moral demand upon another agent, it needs to be presupposed that the other agent is in fact both physically and cognitively able of addressing the demand at hand. In order to have such a capacity, Darwall thinks, it must, however, also be presupposed that the demand in fact carries sufficient 'authoritative weight' in order to motivate the agent towards such an action from the standpoint of her practical reason. In Darwall's (2006, 34) words, "what makes a rational person subject to moral obligation must itself include a source of motivation to do as he is morally obligated. (…) The second-personal competence that makes us subject to moral obligation must include a source of the reasons in which moral obligation consists, along with the capacity to act on these reasons." It is thus in the nature of moral demands itself that individuals also have the capacity to act upon them. Therefore, Darwall seems to think, once individuals have become aware of a moral demand, their acts and omissions automatically are equally blameworthy when they fail to act upon such moral demands, since such recognition implies that it reasonably lies within their capacity to act.

Even more, Darwall holds that all free and rational persons hold this competence to be motivated by moral demands and have the capacity to act upon this motivation. He builds on a view provided by Thomas Scanlon, who also argues that "thinking about right and wrong is, at the most basic level, thinking about what could be justified to others on grounds that they, if appropriately motivated, could not reasonably reject" (1998, 5). Darwall and Scanlon use the notion of reasonability

to support their Kantian view that all free and rational individuals are subject to moral obligations because by virtue of the recognizing that there are internal reasons for them to consider moral demands in their deliberations they are sufficiently motivated to act upon these reasons. If they fail to act upon the moral demands, they are morally blameworthy, since it can be reasonably expected by other persons that they would have been able to act upon the moral demands. It thus seems that they assume that there are some internal reasons which are recognized by all individuals, and that therefore all individuals are equally accountable to act upon these reasons.

Such views are opposed, on the other hand, by pluralist theorists who have a more particularistic conception of individual capacity to recognize and act upon moral demands. In his account of internal and external reasons Williams, for example, leaves open the possibility that even if an individual has become aware of a moral demand, she may still not fully understand the position of this demand within her *subjective motivational set*. A person may thus be aware of an internal reason for thinking that a moral demand has some authority, while not (yet) thinking that this moral demand also has most authority in directing her towards action from the motivational point of view. Such a view focuses on an agent's particular ability to act upon moral justifications, and suggests that not all agents have a constant equal competence to be motivated toward moral demands. Hence, even if we assume that we all have a similar capacity to internally recognize moral demands as free and rational agents, the capacity to act upon these moral demands may be different for different persons and over different times.

To clarify this point it may be helpful to quote another insightful pluralist moral theorist, Samuel Scheffler, at length. He argues:

> Despite the undeniable strength of self-interested motives, powerful motivations that are responsive to moral considerations can also emerge during the course of an individual's development, motivations deeply rooted in the structure of the individual's personality. Moreover, these motivations help shape the interests of those who possess them, and while their existence does not guarantee that conflicts between morality's demands and the agent's interests will never arise, neither do they always work to the long-term disadvantage of their possessors (Scheffler 1992, 4).

Scheffler here emphasizes that individual motivations may develop over time and are thus the result of a process of ongoing internal discovery. Compared to the view that certain internal reasons are available to all free and rational agents, this view suggests that the moral authority connected to moral demands can be different for different individuals. Even after an individual has become aware of a moral demand, one person may be more willing to act upon this demand than another.

Wallace himself thinks that, in the end, there is no significant difference between Kantian contractualist and neo-Humean pluralist accounts of moral responsibility. He argues, "even the Kantian will have to acknowledge, a phenomenon that we might refer to as inherent irrationality" (1997, 326).

By inherent rationality, Wallace refers to instances in which the "continued capacity to deliberate correctly is suspended." Since it is obvious that there are circumstances or states of minds (e.g. as part of psychopathy) in which persons fail to grasp moral justifications, contractualists have to concede that it is the individual capacity to make a moral evaluation which makes an act or omission morally blameworthy. Wallace argues, however, that "we have not yet sunk to the point where it cannot generally be taken for granted that the people we interact with are competent to grasp the deliberative significance of moral justifications" (1997, 327). Those instances, Wallace thinks, in which neo-Humean pluralists argue that different people have a different ability to recognize the authority of a moral demand, are cases which Kantians would accept as belonging to the inherent rationality which inevitably is found among a relatively small number of individuals in each society. He thinks that since both theories accept that the capacity to reason morally is something which admits to degrees (for example between young children and adults), in practice there is no significant disagreement among pluralists and contractualists about the extent to which people can generally be held morally accountable.

I beg to differ, on the other hand, that even if there are no differences in persons' capacity to grasp moral justifications, there are important differences in the moral authority that these demands carry for each individual. I think Wallace fails to see that there is an important distinction between cognitive capacity and motivational ability, when he points out that in some instances a person's capacity to deliberate rationally is suspended. I argue that it is more plausible to think that while all individuals have the capacity to recognize the justifications of moral demands, due to coping mechanisms their actual ability to act upon them may be decreased. Moral accountability does not necessarily, as Wallace sees it, have to function as an exhaustive constraint on the actions that an individual is allowed to undertake morally speaking without being blamed for them. If a certain moral demand carries a low level of authority within the standpoint of practical reason, individual motivational ability to take this demand into account in their actions and deliberations decreases. Therefore I think it is unfair to hold those who are less motivated to act upon moral demands accountable to the same extent as those who are more motivated to undertake morally praiseworthy actions. If one is less motivated to act upon a moral demand, the demand that is being made itself may lie outside the capacity of the individual. It follows from this that the individual cannot be fully blamed for such a lack of motivation.

Nevertheless, it is possible for a person's acts and omissions to not be subject to full moral blame, while also not being morally innocent either. Individuals are still morally obligated to undertake what does lie within their motivational ability. It is therefore important to make a trade-off between the moral demands that an individual is aware of, and the authority that these demands carry within her standpoint of individual practical reason. This trade-off manifests itself in different degrees of

moral culpability.

I derive this view on a scale of moral blameworthiness from insights provided by Larry May in his account of shared responsibility (1992). In providing this conception of shared responsibility May recognizes the need to expand "our vocabulary to account for the various gradations of fault of the disparate members of a community. In this sense, shame, regret, and taint are as important as guilt" (1992, 1). May suggests that individual characteristics, such as attitudes, are at least *partially* under the control of the individual. He "mixes element of choice and control", to argue that even if one is not *fully* in control over one's attitudes, it still makes sense to hold an individual morally accountable to some degree. Similarly, individuals who lack the capacity to act upon moral demands despite internal awareness of certain moral principles, must also be hold morally responsible to some extent for failing to live up to such demands when they are able to recognize them.

Even though someone is not sufficiently motivated to act upon a moral demand, by recognizing a reason that gives some authority to this moral demand, individuals themselves are aware that the action they are performing falls within the scope of moral accountability. Although they may not think that the moral demand has significant authority to guide their actions, since it carries some authority individuals are at least morally accountable to continue deliberating on the significance of this moral demand. The lowest degree of moral accountability thus manifests itself in the responsibility to counter one's own coping mechanisms by not obscuring the significance of moral demands that one sees as too demanding to guide your actions. Instead, even if you are unable to change your acts and omissions, being aware of a moral demand renders you sufficiently able to continue performing the similar acts and omissions while, for example, maintaining feelings of regret or shame. As I have argued in this chapter, at some points in time maintaining such feelings are all that an individual is morally obligated to do in relation to the moral responsibility that she carries for her acts and omissions. While for other persons the moral obligation to feel regret may be too lenient, because they have a greater motivational ability to undertake actions towards a certain moral demand.

It has not been my aim to solve disputes among individuals who perceive different moral demands and corresponding obligations. The entire point of this thesis is to argue that we should accept such disputes, while focusing the discussion on explaining why we think that it is within our capacity to act or not act upon a moral demand. This does not mean, however, that we cannot still assume there are certain moral demands which all individuals are capable of recognizing, and of which no coping mechanism will ever obscure the full significance. However, in relation to remedial responsibility in specific, I think it is important to recognize that some individuals have a greater motivational ability to be motivated towards certain moral demands, than do others, and that such different abilities do come with different obligations.

This also does not mean, though, that with regards to less demanding moral principles,

individuals can choose to fully ignore the significance of certain moral demands, by referring to their motivational inability to actually doing so. The most lenient moral obligation to undertake certain acts or omissions while maintaining a sense of regret, is a type of action I believe all individuals are able to undertake once they are aware of the moral nature of their actions. It follows that, after becoming aware of a moral demand, a person cannot actively *choose* to become unaware of that moral demand, without failing to live up to the moral obligation to maintain a sense of regret or shame. Such a failure in itself would be regarded as morally blameworthy, in that a person ought to feel a sense of shame or regret for the act of actively choosing to ignore the recognized significance of a moral demand. At the moment of choosing to ignore, either a person has to actively undertake a morally regrettable action, or she has to decide that the moral demand was not something morally significant in the first place. This second decision may initially be the result of coping mechanisms obscuring the full significance of a moral demand. I think, however, that the moral obligation to maintain a sense of regret or shame is lenient enough for each individual to undertake with regards to a moral demand, even if its significance is greatly obscured by coping mechanisms. At least, realistically speaking, there is greater likelihood that the obligation to maintain a sense of regret does lie within an individual's initial capacity, while the capacity to undertake more demanding actions does not. In relation to remedial responsibility, for example, it is one thing to ask of people to invest their time or money in aiding the world's poor, while it is another to ask of them to maintain a sense of regret or shame for not being able to do so.

By taking the natural tendency towards coping behavior into account then, I think it is possible to provide a theory of moral responsibility that sufficiently accounts for how people actually are, while also leaving ample room for individual moral culpability when people fail to live up to the moral demands that they are aware of. In the next chapter, I will use the insights gained in this chapter to argue for a moral conception of remedial responsibility. When discussing remedial responsibility, theorists have generally relied on notions of justice in order to obligate people to offset their responsibility for remedying suffering on both global and national scales. I will argue that in case of remedial responsibility, notions of justice are inadequate to provide an account of responsibility since they rely too much on notions of causality and interdependence. Instead, I think that a moral conception of remedial responsibility, based on notions of capacity and awareness, is much better capable of explaining why particular agents carry remedial responsibility. Let me now turn to this point.

### 3.1 Remedial Responsibility: Justice & Morality

In arguing for a moral conception of *remedial* responsibility based on the twin pillars of awareness and capacity, I would like to start by differentiating moral obligations from obligations of justice. To draw

this distinction, it is first important to specify what I mean by remedial responsibility. This specific type of responsibility, as I see it, is the positive obligation that agents have for providing goods and services to other people by virtue of them deserving or being entitled to those goods and services. In this thesis I do not want to consider what it actually means for an agent to deserve or be entitled to something, or when they can make a claim on the positive duties of others. It is simply assumed that many people currently living under very depriving circumstances should be helped through the provision of extra aid. Onora O'Neill specifies a key characteristic of the duty to supply such goods and services when she mentions that "we can know who violates a liberty right without any allocation of obligations, but we cannot tell who violates a right to goods or services unless obligations have been allocated" (2005, 428). According to such a view, we must first allocate obligations to specific agents before we can make sense of the positive duty to assume remedial responsibility. Yet, when considering these obligations, there are two more types of principles which can help guide there allocation: principles of justice and moral principles.

As further pointed out by O'Neill (2005, 430), an important difference between these two types of principles is that when regarding principles of justice, there can be no obligations without claimants, whereas when regarding morality, there can be obligations even if there are no specific claimants defined. O'Neill argues that from the perspective of justice, we cannot make sense of universal human rights, if such rights do not provide corresponding obligations to agents for providing them to those who have been deprived of their rights. That is to say from the perspective of justice we cannot at the same time hold that human rights have normative value, while they do not simultaneous invoke specified counterpart obligations. For to say that others have a right to goods and services, according to principles of justice is to specify exactly who is responsible for supplying them, otherwise the rights to such goods and services is itself meaningless. From the perspective of morality, on the other hand, we can say that individuals have a moral obligation to account for moral principles, simply by the nature of moral demands themselves – without anyone having to make a claim on them. In the case of morality, the nature of obligations is not located in a claim, but by virtue of other qualities that can function as evaluative mechanisms for appraising individual acts and omissions. To say that I am morally responsible is not to say that somebody first needs to make a claim on me having to behave morally, but rather I become morally responsible for my conduct by virtue of an appraisal of my conduct itself.

Such a moral appraisal as I see it must account for the three conditions specified in section 2.1 of this thesis, focusing on individual awareness and capacity as basis for evaluating a person her conduct. I think that we can derive from such a moral appraisal of a person her conduct, as opposed to assessment based on a principle of justice, that while justice is something which we can force upon one another, morality is not. Moral evaluation of someone else's conduct is based on my own

perception of the moral nature of my acts and omissions. By definition, however, awareness is something which is inevitably mine, and which cannot be forced upon me, without me actually recognizing the same moral principle as somebody else may do. In the legal realm one is regarded innocent until proven otherwise, but when indeed proven guilty, the justice system will force individuals to be hold accountable regardless of whether they agree or not. When considering morality, on the contrary, accountability can only be invoked by individuals themselves. Even if somebody can blame me for my acts or omissions, as long as I am (1) unaware of the moral demand that her claim is based upon, (2) unaware of the morally relevant state of affairs affected by my acts or omissions, or (3) think that I could not have reasonably be expected to have acted otherwise, all the blame in the world would still not make me feel blameworthy. One can try to explain to me why I am morally accountable, but without myself recognizing the validity of this claim, I cannot be held morally responsible - even though according to principles of justice I may be found guilty.

Yet then, how can moral responsibility function as an adequate principle in guiding our conduct towards alleviating the world's plight?

According to David Miller it cannot. In his account of remedial responsibility Miller (2001, 455–64) makes the distinction between casual responsibility and moral responsibility as principles of remedial responsibility, where I think his notion of causal responsibility can be seen as a principle of justice. Whereas causal responsibility focuses on the causal role that an agent has in bringing about the outcome of state of affairs, moral responsibility "involves an appraisal of the agent's conduct." Such an appraisal, according to Miller, "requires us to ask questions such as whether the agent intended the outcome, whether he foresaw it, whether his behavior violated some standard of reasonable care, and so forth." In these aspects, Miller thinks that moral responsibility is a narrower notion than causal responsibility, since there will be many instances in which an agent's conduct cannot be blamed morally speaking, while there is some sort of link between his acts and omissions and the harmful consequences they have on the faraway and needy. Yet, Miller also acknowledges that in some other sense moral responsibility may be a wider notion than outcome responsibility, for it can render agents blameworthy for some state of affairs, even when there is no direct and clear relation between their acts and omissions and the existence of a harmful state.

Miler here seems to agree that, especially when considering the world's plights, moral responsibility is a much more suitable notion in assigning responsibility than casual responsibility. First, he argues that in cases of human right deprivations, for example, there are often no identifiable agents who have clearly caused this state of affairs. Secondly, causal connection in global networks involve many diverse agents which have all contributed to the outcome in some sense, but among whom it is near to impossible to designate to what extent each particular individual contributed. And at last, causation alone is not necessarily sufficient in assigning responsibility, because it is possible for agents

to cause negative outcomes through their actions, without those actions themselves being blameworthy – for example where poverty results from fair and equal competition in a market system.

Yet, Miller goes on to argue that moral responsibility is also not an adequate principle for assigning remedial responsibility: "the biggest problem with the moral responsibility principle (…) – one that it shares with the causal principle – is that it looks too exclusively to the past in assigning remedial responsibility" (2001, 460). According to Miller, moral responsibility is not so much concerned with asking who is best capable of remedying a state of affairs per se, but more with how this capacity relates to agents their acts and omissions and how they brought about a harmful state of affairs. This is where I divert from Miller's reading of moral responsibility, because I employ a different understanding of capacity than he does – one that I think is inherent to moral responsibility.

The key difference is, I think, that Miller seems to use a more consequentialist utilitarian reading of capacity, whereas I have argued for a notion of capacity that situates itself in the standpoint of individual reason. What matters on this second reading is not how effective on is in remedying a depriving state of affairs, or how much costs an individual agent needs to bear, but rather how an individual herself perceives these qualities in relation to her capacity. On this reading, if a person perceives her own ability to remedy a poor state of affairs as effective or relatively undemanding, she has a greater capacity to in fact do so, and therefore failing to do so should incur a greater level of moral blame, compared to when she would perceive that she only has a very minimal ability to do so.

Even more, on Miller's reading of capacity, he argues the concept neither adequately accounts for the historical conditions which explain why agents have certain capacities in the first place, nor can capacity as a principle account for the relations between specific agents and how this is related to their mutual responsibility. On such an interpretation I think Miller fails to see that capacity is not merely a physical quality, but also cognitive one. In this sense, the fact that my own physical capacity has been generated by, say for example, historical injustices can affect my motivational ability to help those at the other, less fortunate, end of the spectrum. If I think that my ability to give aid to those less well-off is the consequence of historical injustices, while I also recognize some moral demand of (intergenerational) fairness, I also perceive the moral nature of my acts and omissions as more significant in relation to those who have suffered from those injustices. Besides, my motivational ability for taking responsibility for the consequences of my acts and omissions are also higher when I perceive the agents who are affected as having a special relationship to me. Such a relation is, however, not necessarily provided by cultural similarities, but rather by how I perceive this relation to be. It is granted that many people will think it more significant to help their kin and compatriots, and thereby have a greater capacity to do so, yet still this is not all there is to say about it. It is also not unlikely that I perceive that I have a much closer relationship to some people living across the globe, thereby rendering me - motivationally speaking - more capable to take their positions into account while

performing my acts and omissions as compared to when considering my compatriots.

In the next section I wish to expand on these claims about the nature of moral remedial responsibility, and argue that moral responsibility is in fact an adequate principle for filling the gap that has been left open by the allocation of obligations in accordance with principles of justice in relation to individual remedial responsibility.

### 3.2 Moral Remedial Responsibility

The main issue with moral principles guiding our remedial responsibility seems to be that if we cannot force morality upon one another, there are no obligations to actually address harmful situations. On the awareness and capacity account I proposed, the question remains: how to make sense of moral remedial responsibility when people may be actively trying to avert their awareness away from moral demands, harmful conditions, and (to the extent that it is consciously possible) decrease their motivation to act upon such demands and conditions.

One response is to say that moral remedial responsibility simply is inadequate in addressing remedial responsibility, and that it purely is a matter of justice to allocate positive duties for providing goods and services to those living under harmful conditions. Although I do agree that there is an important role for justice to play here, as should be clear by now, this is not the type of response I am offering within this thesis. In the previous chapter I made clear that individuals are morally responsible to the extent that they are aware of moral demands, the morally relevant state of affairs, and it lies within their capacity to act upon this awareness. Despite my argument that there are obligations for different types of acts depending on the motivational ability that an individual has to act upon such awareness, I argued that all individuals at least have a minimal obligation to actively try and remain aware of moral demands, even if they may not be required to actively act upon them. By lowering the moral obligations at such initial points of awareness, I argued that individual capacity to work towards moral demands over time becomes greater.

At the basis of this minimal obligation in relation to remedial responsibility lies a conception of moral universalism which is close to the idea of "internal essentialism" Martha Nussbaum has developed. I believe that "the deepest examination of human history and human cognition *from within* still reveals a more or less determinate account of the human being" (Nussbaum 1992, 207 emphasis in original). This idea is what Nussbaum refers to as, first, "empirical essentialism," and thereafter as "internal essentialism." This account is based on a notion of common human functioning. Although I will not go into specifics on what characteristics Nussbaum attributes to this notion, I wish to point out that I share her idea that one characteristic of what makes humans human is that they have a capacity for affiliation with other human beings (Nussbaum 1992, 219). If people fail to show even the most minimal degree of affiliation and concern for others, they commonly cannot be regarded as humans.

(I would prefer the term 'person' instead of 'human' here, but I will stick to the terms Nussbaum is using.) Besides, based on this capacity for affiliation, I also agree with Nussbaum that a human pursuing the good life, will be able "to live for and with others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of familial and social interaction" (Nussbaum 1992, 222). Although each person may in fact have a different conception of the threshold after which the amount of concern one shows represent the good life, it is important to recognize that we all do see the generic notion of concern for others as a good thing. There is at the most basic level the essentialist conviction "that the other is one of us", and it is based upon the recognition of this minimal compassion to others that we are at least minimally aware of the moral demand to take others into account with regards to our acts and omissions. Appraisal of my acts and omissions on this view should be done by virtue of the effects that they have on those with whom I share a common humanity.

However, evaluating moral responsibility by virtue of a common humanity does not at face-value account for the qualities of awareness and capacity that I have put so much weight on in the second chapter of this thesis. For one, Iris Marion Young seems to provide a possible account on how we can make sense of moral responsibility to those faraway and living under severe circumstances in relation to awareness of common relations and our capacity to act upon them. Through distinguishing between a liability model and a social connection model for allocating responsibility, Young also argues against the standard focus on principles of justice in assigning responsibility (Young 2006, 115–25). On the liability model, she points out, responsibility is allocated by assigning agents with guilt for a depriving state of affairs. Such a model, however, "relies on a fairly direct interaction between the wrongdoer and the wronged party" (Young 2006, 118). Similarly to the Miller's notion of causal responsibility, due to the complexity of many harmful states of affairs such a model is inadequate for distributing remedial responsibility in relation to the world's plight. Young argues, that "while it is usually inappropriate to *blame* those agents who are connected to but removed from harm, it is also inappropriate (…) to allow them (us) to say that they (we) have nothing to do with it" (Young, 2006, 118 emphasis in original). Based upon this reasoning, she argues for a social connection model for assigning responsibility. Such a model is much tighter related to the notion of capacity I have been arguing for than is Miller's.

In the social connection model, responsibility is assigned by referring to agents "carrying out in a morally appropriate way and aiming for certain outcomes" (Young 2006, 119). What is important on this account is the social role that a specific agent has, and the corresponding actions that we can morally expect her to undertake by virtue of this position. For example, as part of my position as a consumer in a global market society, it is not possible to blame me for injustice in this market society on the basis of me having caused them. Yet, since by virtue of my role as a consumer I am related to those affected by the existence of the system I am maintaining (Young pays special attention to

workers in sweatshop), I am still responsible for undertaking morally appropriate actions. Young thinks such actions should primarily come in the form of political actions, through which we take responsibility together for depriving conditions. She also emphasizes that not all agents within this system have an equal responsibility to take such action. Depending on an agent her power, privileges, interests, and collective ability the capacity of some agents is greater than others, thereby also giving them a greater responsibility to tackle injustices (Young 2006, 126–30).

In contrast to Miller, Young here thus thinks of capacity more in the sense of actual individual ability, where greater ability leads to greater responsibility, to some extent regardless of how this relates to other agents' ability. What is most important is not that the extent to which people are responsible for remedying poor situations is fair compared to the share of others based upon their relative contribution to the problem. Though Young thinks that this is one aspect which should play a role in assigning responsibility, since we cannot make a clear judgement of the extent to which each agent has contributed to depriving conditions, she thinks it is better to put most emphasize on individual ability by virtue of an agent her social role.

Although I think it is important for assigning remedial responsibility that we focus on an agent's capacity, I disagree with the emphasis that Young puts on the actual interdependence between agents. She differs from Miller in emphasizing a more forward-looking principle of capacity in assigning responsibility, but I think that by relating this principle to the social position of agents she also shares with Miller the focus on physical ability, while remaining to neglect motivational ability. In order to make a better assessment of the moral obligations of agents, as I have argued, I think it is also important to give weight to what agents perceive their ability to be, regardless of what is actually within their physical capacity.

This idea on an individual's capacity and its relation to moral responsibility is tightly connected to a more recent argument proposed by David Zoller. He argues that "[a person who is aware of a moral demand but fails to fulfill corresponding obligations] does not fail to imagine that there are moral stakes, consequences, and victims in unstructured collective action; however, her contributory actions suggest she fails to imagine that these stakes are real and that victims are real persons whose autonomy can exercise claims on her freedom. This sort of failure (…) is a class of moral harm in itself" (2015, 997). Zoller here acknowledges that what is important for an agent to be morally blameworthy is that she recognizes a connection between her acts and omissions and the corresponding state of affairs. Anyone who does recognize such a connection, but fails to account for it in her actions, according to Zoller is indeed a moral wrongdoer. Zoller here also defends himself against the objection that it can be argued that individuals always should be aware of certain consequences of their actions. He argues that "what I "ought to have recognized" for purposes of moral responsibility must be sensitive to the information I have at the time I act. If the agent could not reasonably have seen her

action as a cause of a given harm – granting that she already does not jointly intend the outcome – then she could not have been reasonably expected to see that harm as hinging on her action" (2015, 1000–1001). In other words, in order for agents to be morally responsible they need to be aware of the moral nature of the acts and omissions that they are performing. Upon becoming knowledgeable agents, persons recognize moral principles that let them to perceive other agents as moral equals. Failing to take this equal status of the perceived others into account, according to Zoller, then is morally blameworthy.

Despite my agreement with the account of morality that Zoller has developed, in the positive account sketched in the second chapter of this thesis I made it clear that awareness alone is a necessary but not automatically a sufficient condition to render agents morally responsible to the full extent. I would like to add to the view that Zoller is proposing in relation to remedial responsibility, that besides awareness of a connection between my acts and omissions and their relation to other agents, my capacity to act upon this awareness is also influencing the *degree* to which I am morally responsible. Granting that awareness alone may be sufficient to make me morally accountable in a minimal sense, my capacity to actually act upon the awareness of the moral nature of my acts and omissions can make me more or less accountable. If coping mechanisms obscure the moral nature of my actions by decreasing the perceived significance of a moral principle, my motivational ability to act upon such a principle also decreases (even if I remain aware of the principle). It follows from this, as I argue, that at that point in time agents are also morally accountable to a lesser degree, than if the moral nature of their acts and omissions had not been obscured. In this sense it is not necessarily morally blameworthy to the full extent if I fail to perceive the equal status of other human beings. Although it may be within my capacity to perceive all human beings as equal, due to coping mechanisms my current ability may obscure the full significance of this equal status making feel more comfortable going about my daily life, neglecting the lives of other faraway human beings. This is also not to say that people may not genuinely hold that they have greater obligations to those closer to then than to others far away. Yet, upon becoming aware of others they can never – morally speaking - fully neglect the others, and should consider their awareness of all other humans in their deliberations, acts and omissions.

Still, even though one may accept this argument for awareness and capacity as a guiding conditions for a moral principle of remedial responsibility, one may still be very skeptical about the extent to which these conditions can make people morally responsible for offsetting their moral obligations. Thomas Pogge, for example, differentiates between positive duties and negative duties, and argues that:

> The positive formulation is easier to substantiate. It need be shown only that [people] are very badly off, that we are very much better off and that we could relieve some of their suffering without becoming badly-off ourselves. But this ease comes at a price: some who accept the positive formulation think of the moral reasons it provides as a weak and discretionary, and thus do not feel obligated to promote worthy causes, especially costly ones. Many feel entitled, at least, to support good causes of their choice – their church or *alma mater*, cancer research or the environment – rather than putting themselves out for total strangers half a world away, with whom they share no bond of community or culture (Pogge 2001, 60).

This is exactly the kind of argument that I set out to tackle with this thesis in the first place, since I think it misplaces the question we should be focusing on. Pogge here takes for granted the realistic idea that individuals are rather reluctant to provide aid to the far away and needy. He goes on to take this empirical idea on human reluctance as a reason for shifting towards principles of justice as the main virtue by which remedial obligations should be allocated. However, I think that this focus on principles of justice which we see in Pogge's theory and in other forms in the theories of other philosophers as well, is sensitive to his own argument that people are aversive to providing aid to those who need it. I think that the rather negligible progress made over the past several decades in improving the lives of the badly-off, or a glimpse at current levels of global inequality, should be able to raise questions on how effective principles of justice in fact are in allocating (and more importantly, offsetting) obligations for remedial responsibility.

Instead, on the account developed in this thesis, I think more can be done to fill this gap in remedial responsibility by making people aware of a moral demand to do so, while at the same time focusing on the capacity that they actually have to fulfill this moral demand. By opening this discussion, we are moving to the questions which I think are most important. In asking of people to what extent it is within their capacity to help, we move away from universalized obligations that apply equally to all individuals. Instead, people are morally accountable for remedial responsibility to the extent that it is within their motivational ability to offset this responsibility. Even if this capacity is initially very low, by posing the moral obligation that they remain aware of the moral demand and the moral nature of their acts and omissions, it has been argued that their motivational ability to act will increase over time, and thereby thus also a person's actual ability to do so. In a world where we stop obscuring the full significance of moral demands person by person, it will only be a matter of time before what was initially perceived as idealistic, will become sufficiently realistic.

## 4. Conclusion

I started this thesis by quoting Secretary-General António Guterres' statement that there is no excuse for inaction or indifference in aiding the world's hungry. Some may think that while my argument has followed this line of thinking in arguing against indifference, at the same time I have in fact offered an

excuse for inaction: coping. The way in which people perceive things to be, may result in them having less stringent moral obligations. Yet, although I see coping behavior as a reality with which we have to live, and one that we need to take into account when thinking about our moral obligations, I all but see it as a definite excuse for inaction. In this thesis I hope to have offered a starting point for thinking about the relation between coping and moral responsibility. My overall aim has been to start a new discussion on what lies within human motivational ability, and how we can make sense of related moral obligations. With this aim in mind, I hope to have offered an account that is sufficiently realistic, while also remaining satisfactorily idealistic.

I started by offering three conditions that I think are essential for guiding our thinking about moral responsibility in relation to coping behavior: roughly speaking, individuals must (1) be aware of a moral demand, (2) be aware of the morally relevant state of affairs, and (3) must to some degree have the physical and motivational ability to act upon this awareness. While I regard the first two conditions as static provisions, the third condition is one that comes in degrees. Awareness is seen as a necessary and minimally sufficient requirement for being morally accountable, while the degree of moral responsibility is positively correlated to the degree of a person her motivational and physical capacity. With regards to motivational ability in specific, I have argued that if one has a greater motivation to act towards a moral demand, this also comes with greater obligations to do so. Even if all persons may have an equal capacity for recognizing moral demands, they at times may not have an equal ability to act upon these demands. For people to increase this ability, it is important that the initial moral demands posed upon them are not outside of their motivational ability at that time, and therefore cannot be too stringent.

In order to defend why I think that moral obligations must take motivational ability into account, I have situated this account of morality as a theory of moral reason. First, I have drawn on and extended William's account of internal reasons to argue that it does not make sense to think a person has a moral reason to do something, if she herself does not recognize and is not motivated towards this reason. Such an argument may be criticized by what are known as theories of moral standards, according to which there are external reasons that people should take into account regardless of their awareness of such reasons. To counter this objection, I followed Darwall in saying that in order to think of an act or omission as blameworthy, a person must think that her acts are in fact culpable – she must be aware of the moral nature of her actions. Even if one may hold that certain actions are morally desirable, in itself this desirability does not provide another person with a reason for action, unless she herself is aware of this desirability. Yet, in this thesis I have assumed that all individuals have an equal capacity for becoming aware of the desirability of moral demands. At face-value, this assumption would provide all persons with internal reasons for undertaking certain morally important actions. Nevertheless, I have also defended the view that even if we do not assume that all

individuals have an equal capacity for recognizing moral justifications, my account of moral responsibility still holds – providing we accept the implication that some acts and omissions may fall outside the scope of morality (while remaining within the scope of justice).

What is important, though, is that the cognitive capacity to recognize moral demands needs to be distinguished from the physical and motivational ability to act upon them. To better understand this differentiation I related my account to both Kantian and neo-Humean accounts of moral responsibility. Upon becoming aware of a moral demand, which Kantians hold that all rational individuals can do, this demand carries varying amounts of authoritative weight within the standpoint of practical reason of different individuals. Dependent on the amount of authoritative weight it carries, according to neo-Humean accounts, one has a greater or lesser capacity to act upon this demand. I combined these two accounts by distinguishing between the individual capacity to recognize moral justifications and the capacity to act upon them. I argued that, if a moral demand carries less authoritative weight, the potential for action is smaller, whereas if it carries more, the potential for action is greater. Only if the motivational ability of individuals is increased (if the authoritative weight of the moral demand is increased), does our capacity to act upon these moral demands increase, and so do the moral obligations that we have for doing so. Depending on the motivational ability that different people have at different points in time in relation to a moral demand, I argued that some are morally obligated to maintain feelings of shame or regret, while others could in fact be morally obligated to undertake certain concrete actions. I also responded to the possible objection that due to coping mechanisms this would mean that people can choose not to accept the full significance of a moral demand, by arguing that the obligation to maintain a sense of shame or regret is likely to be in most people their initial motivational ability. Therefore, morally speaking, we generally cannot actively obscure the moral obligation to take the full significance of a moral demand into account when conducting certain morally relevant actions.

In chapter three, I linked this general account on moral responsibility to remedial responsibility in specific. I argued that principles of justice, although important, by themselves are inadequate in providing an account on why we should help the world's badly-off. This gap in obligations of remedial responsibility, I think can be filled by providing a moral account of remedial responsibility. One that does not focus on the allocation of obligations by virtue of their relation to a certain outcome, but rather on the obligations that people have by virtue of their moral conduct based on the two pillars of awareness and capacity. I specifically argued against Miller's backward-looking conception of capacity. An individual's motivational ability to perform acts does not fully correlate to the outcome of her acts and omissions; instead, the focal point is what she perceives to be the outcome, and what she perceives may be different from what she does. From a moral perspective, if I perceive that the outcome of my actions have great effects for aiding the world's poor at a very low cost, while I also

have the motivational ability to undertake these actions, I am morally required to undertake them, regardless of how this capacity arose. One's motivational ability is, however, often influenced by current circumstances and past phenomena, as well as by coping mechanisms responding to demanding obligations, and thereby does affect the moral obligations that a person has.

Yet, I have agreed with Martha Nussbaum's ideas on common humanity that people have a common capacity for a minimal level of compassion towards "others", which functions as a basis for an account of moral universalism. Although we perceive to have special relationships towards our kin and compatriots, for instance, and this influences our motivational ability and corresponding moral obligations, by virtue of our common humanity we can never fully neglect the significance of taking all others into account when considering moral demands. It has been argued that what is important for our moral obligations, is not that we are through some system of interdependence connected to others, or that our actions are affecting others, but that we are aware of the moral nature of our acts and omissions in relation to others. There is a minimal moral obligation to take all other people into account with regard to moral demands by virtue of our common humanity. When we are aware that there is a moral demand requiring us to act differently by virtue of this common humanity, this brings with it the minimal moral obligation to feel regret or shame if we fail to do so.

I hope that my argument for this universal minimal obligation of feelings of shame and regret in relation to our failure to remedy the circumstances under which the world's badly-off live, we can work towards a slow but gradual change in our perception of our capacity to provide aid. Although for some people, a feeling of shame may be too lenient for them to fully offset their moral responsibility, I think that this minimal moral obligation that we all share can function as an adequate starting point for thinking about what we actually should do to help the faraway and needy. Instead of (partly subconsciously) hiding ourselves behind the idea that providing aid is such an unrealistic and over demanding obligation, let us instead focus on why exactly we think that it is so demanding. Even if we conclude, then, that for whatever reason it is in fact physically or cognitively too demanding to provide aid, there is I think no reason for us not to accept a feeling of regret that we are unable to do so once we recognize that there is a moral demand on doing so. By itself, such a collective acceptance of regret may open new doors on what we think we are capable of doing, thereby contributing to remedying the world's plights in the longer-run.

More generally speaking, I hope that with this thesis I have provided a new way for thinking about moral responsibility; one that is both consistent with human nature, while also providing a basis for thinking about what we ought to do. I have tried to think of moral demands from a more bottom-up approach, by which morality is grounded in individual awareness and capacity. This approach does not provide us with stable ground for differentiating between different moral principles, but rather asks us to ground morality in relative subjectivity. Such an approach I think, to many people, may seem

as unstable – and therefore morally unfit. Yet, I think that it is exactly this instability which will make it possible for more people to behave in a morally more appropriate manner. By requiring people to think about the moral demands that they recognize, and what moral obligations they have for fulfilling these demands, the thinking about morality is moved to the brink of realism and idealism. It is, I think and hope, precisely at this edge, that we can gain most in not only thinking about our behavior, but eventually also changing our behavior.

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