The Victim's Perspective

Essays on Moral Responsibility

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The Victim's Perspective: Essays on Moral Responsibility

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Abstract:

This thesis approaches the moral responsibility debate from the "victim's perspective," a perspective that is often neglected in the literature. My aim is to show that by taking the victim's perspective, philosophical discussions can gain a more spherical if not, complete picture of responsibility practices. The thesis explores the implications of adopting or excluding certain perspectives in philosophical discussions of moral responsibility, especially regarding the relationship between moral responsibility and blame. Specifically, my assumption is that in order to understand blame, and other moral responses, we need to be aware of the situatedness of philosophical inquiry and take a closer look at different social realities. In addition, my claim is that we need to understand that responsibility as a moral and social practice which is fundamentally impacted by structural injustice and philosophers' situated epistemic standpoint.

In the thesis, I investigate from a victim-based point of view, different types of blaming responses such as epistemic blame, victim blaming, and moral protest. My overarching aim in doing so is to highlight how this alternative perspective can make sense of previously uncharted dimensions of the debate. Taking the victim's perspective into account can help us develop a more complex picture of how we blame and when we blame. The first aspect of blame I am going to look at, epistemic blame, focuses on the awareness or knowledge required for someone to be blameworthy. I will then move on to victim blaming. This is a social phenomenon, but it is also of philosophical phenomenon, because it shows how our blaming responses can be misguided, namely by blaming the victim of an offense instead of the wrongdoer. Finally, I will also look at moral protest as an alternative response to blame. What is important with regard to this issue is that moral protest can be adopted by victims when they are systematically victimized but cannot get out of the harmful relationship. The last paper of the thesis examines what we do after blame responses have been made and it may be time for the process of forgiveness to begin. The discussion of forgiveness is also novel insofar as it focuses on how victims fit into that process.

Key words: blame, moral responsibility, victim, perspective, forgiveness

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MADE IN SWEDEN

To the girl in yellow

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List of Papers

Paper I

Leventi, M. (2024b). The victim's perspective: How thinking about the victim can provide answers to philosophical issues of responsibility. dePICTions volume 4: Victimhood. The Paris Institute for Critical Thinking. https://parisinstitute.org/the-victims-perspective/

Paper II

Leventi, M. (2024a). Victim Blaming, Justified Risks, and Imperfect Victims. Feminist Philosophy Quarterly, 10(1/2).

Paper III

Rethinking Moral Protest: Supporting Vulnerable Groups Beyond Blame (under review)

Paper IV

Understanding the Process of Forgiving (under review)

Introduction

The Medusa Statue

In Greek mythology, Medusa is a priestess punished for a crime she did not herself commit but that she instead was the victim of. The story is the following. After Poseidon raped Medusa in Athena's temple, the goddess of wisdom transformed Medusa into a monster with snakes for hair. The strands of her new cursed and snake-shaped hair turned to stone anyone who dared to look straight into Medusa's eyes. According to Greek tradition, this was Athena's 'punishment' and thus Medusa found herself victimized once more after Poseidon's sexual assault in the temple she herself worshipped. The message of this story was clear, instead of punishing the perpetrator, the myth and the later retellings cast Medusa as a terrifying villain that is to be defeated by the hero Perseus. With Perseus's fatal attack, Medusa was victimized for a third and final time.[1]

This story reflects a long history and tradition of blaming and silencing victims, especially women, while celebrating those in power, who often happen to be men. Poseidon, the master of sea, is portrayed as a powerful god and Perseus is a hero, a legendary monster-killer. Medusa, instead, became a symbol of fear and evil, with her decapitated head used as a weapon against the sea monster that was about to attack the maiden Andromeda. Medusa's head is later given to Athena as a prize from Perseus himself. Athena placed the head on her shield as a symbol of protection and from then on Medusa's head becomes part of the goddess's armor and symbols.

In modern discussions on sexual violence against women, this ancient, and quite gruesome, story gained new relevance.[2] In 2017, the #Metoo movement started in social media, where women began sharing the stories of their own experience of sexual assault or violence. The idea was that despite the differences between women there was still a common denominator, which was

[1] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Medusa-Greek-mythology

[2] For more, see Cixous (1976).

sexual violence. What this movement did was to take something that most members of vulnerable groups were already aware of and to make it explicit also to others, namely how powerful men use wealth and influence to abuse and silence victims. A lot of the accused men were very powerful and influential. Like Medusa, many survivors of sexual violence faced disbelief and blame before their voices were finally heard. Of course, it is safe to say that some of these voices have still not been heard.

Since the message from the original story is at the very least disheartening, there is now a reimagining of the Medusa myth where Athena's actions are no longer seen as punishment. On the contrary, Athena's act is one of divine intervention, empowerment and protection. In this new version, after Medusa is raped, Athena does not seek to shame her and hurt her but to shield her, and thus that is why she is putting Medusa's face on her own shield. The transformation from a woman into a monster is no longer presented as a curse, but as a gift. Medusa's terrifying presence and deadly gaze turns predators into stone. No one would dare touch her again. Medusa is no longer seen as a victim. She is a symbol of reclaimed power, and she uses her strength to protect herself. Athena, the goddess of wisdom, sees Medusa not as a disgraced priestess, but as a warrior and so she gives her the weapons to protect herself and ensure safety on her own terms.
In 2020, the statue of Medusa holding the head of Perseus was placed outside a New York courthouse where justice was being sought for the victims who came forward during the #Metoo movement. In this way, the changed narrative of the old myth gained some recognition and acceptance.[3] Instead of the male hero being celebrating the defeat of the female monster, the statue shows Medusa reclaiming power by giving Perseus her fated ending. Medusa is now the hero holing the head of the man that wished to harm her. This reversal of the story challenges the traditional reading of the myth, highlighting victim strength and resilience.

Placed in front of a place of justice, the statue sends a powerful message: Survivors should be heard, acknowledged, and empowered. They should not be blamed and silenced. The statue calls the audience to rethink who the real perpetrators or monsters are, and who are the victims who deserve justice and redress. Most importantly, the statue reminds society of the urgent need to see stories from the perspectives of the victims. Medusa was seen as a monster

[3] https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/13/arts/design/medusa-statue-manhattan.html

even though her story was obviously tragic and unjust. Medusa until very recently needed her own story to be narrated from the victim's perspective.

My aim with this thesis is similar. Instead of using myths from the Greek traditional, this thesis aims to approach traditional questions of moral responsibility from the standpoint of victims, arguing that such a perspective is able to reveal overlooked dimensions of attributions of blame, moral responses and moral repair.

Overview

The rest of the introduction to this thesis consists of six sections. The first section presents the motivation, aim and inspiration of this thesis explaining why we need to include the perspective of the victims when we discuss issues related to moral responsibility in a philosophical context. These three aspects of the thesis, motivation, aim and inspiration, can to some extent overlap, but I still view them as distinct parts of this project.

The next section presents the main claims of this thesis and situates them within the ongoing debate on moral responsibility in the literature. Following that, I discuss a significant limitation in current research, namely the restricted scope researchers often have in understanding and representing diverse experiences that do not conform to the traditional philosophical narratives. I then describe the account of the victim's perspective in greater detail.

The subsequent section introduces the main concepts that recur throughout the thesis, alongside clarifications of my own philosophical commitments and interpretations. These descriptions are not intended to be seen as a philosophical glossary, instead they intend to narrow the scope of each concept as they are used in this work. Together, these sections are meant to place the thesis within the philosophical literature and demonstrate how the different parts of the argument and analysis form a cohesive whole. I then present summaries of each paper.

In the section after, I elaborate on how the four papers relate to each other. The papers are connected in two main aspects. Firstly, they all have in common that the victim's perspective is the standpoint from which I examine different issues of moral responsibility. Secondly, I suggest that there is a sequence of events that take place after the event of moral harm. Appointing blame, picking moral

response and then negotiating the terms and the possibility of forgiveness can be seen as a moral dialogue between the victim and the perpetrator.

Finally, in the last section, I reflect on the main arguments of the thesis. These reflections lead to proposals for future research and development.

Aim, Motivation and Inspiration

This thesis aims to enrich philosophical work on moral responsibility by incorporating an often-neglected perspective, namely that of the victim. Specifically, it seeks to highlight the victim's lived experience of harm as a relevant and necessary factor in making moral judgments and attributing responsibility. Beyond focusing on the perpetrator's actions, which I assume is the standard philosophical process, this thesis emphasizes fairness and the well-being of all relevant agents as central considerations in moral evaluations.

Recognizing that an objective knowing or understanding of moral issues from an Archimedean point may be unattainable, this work advocates approaching moral responsibility from multiple dimensions and perspectives, including those shaped by personal and social experiences. While it is unrealistic for a single thesis to address and examine all the relevant philosophical frameworks and aspects, it remains possible to clear paths toward more comprehensive and inclusive accounts. This project intends to demonstrate that attending to victims' experiences can significantly influence our judgments about attributions of blame and responsibility.

In order to achieve this, I consider key topics within the moral responsibility debate through the lens of what I call the "victim's perspective," undertaking an analysis of various situations and scenarios to illustrate and support the approach. If we attempt to view the world through this lens, we attempt to see through the eyes of the one who is hurt. We try to remove our presumptions about the victim, and we imagine ourselves or a loved one in the place of that victim. We take the same steps as the victim before the harm, and we try to empathize with the victim after the harm has taken pace. This mental exercise can give insight into how and why the victims acted the way they did and whether there are any external pressures that the victim had to conform to.

Therefore, I explore questions such as: What happens to the victim? How is the victim treated within this scenario? Are we overly and unjustifiably burdening the victim in our moral assessments? This type of inquiries invites

a closer examination of social and academically standardized moral assumptions about the practices around blame and responsibility. Furthermore, they invite a recognition of blame as a complex phenomenon that is laced with moral and social implications.

This investigation considers various examples where victims can react with different blaming responses. Although there is a wide range of moral issues that can arise in this thesis, I will restrict the thesis to include epistemic skepticism about responsibility, victim blaming and alternative options to blaming such as moral protest. Finally, the thesis explores forgiveness as a potential response following blame, emphasizing how victims may be incorporated within this process of forgiveness.

The overarching aim is to offer an alternative understanding of certain issues on moral responsibility by using the perspective of members of vulnerable groups and examine the relevant implications. In addition, I want to provide a more socially based view of moral responsibility, which departs from abstract presentation of examples and which instead focuses on specific cases involving people who are systematically victimized. Finally, I want to create more space for the possibility that there are other experiences than the ones that are most often represented in the relevant literature.

The primary motivation for this thesis stems from the observation that standard treatments of moral responsibility often overlook crucial dimensions of lived moral experience. Moral philosophers tend to approach responsibility issues with clinical detachment, relying on abstract arguments that risk oversimplifying the complexity of those real human interactions in which moral relations take place. Schematically, the detached approach may concern that Agent A harms Agent B, whereafter Agent B forgives Agent A. Of course, although I here am offering my own oversimplification of how these examples are presented, there seems to be a general acceptance of what these examples should be like. They should be abstract and widely applicable, and the main implication should not be influenced if we change any of the specific details. Even though this is a demanding and highly intellectual work, it often distorts reality and undermines the experience of certain people, or its level of abstraction renders the applicability dubious. For instance, being insulted once on my way to work is quite a different experience from being insulted every day in school. Such a difference can often go undetected when the cases are being described in abstract narratives.

This observation has prompted me to question what might be missing from conventional philosophical accounts. It generates the thought that there should

be more to the picture of harm and blame. Thus, I have been led to investigate how the victim's experience, often sidelined or marginalized, might illuminate the dynamics of moral responsibility and enrich philosophical understanding.

Several influential works helped shape this intuition into a theoretical endeavor and provided inspiration on how I can navigate such observations. Miranda Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2007) stands out as a significant contribution, addressing how marginalized groups can be wronged in their capacity as knowers. This theoretical framework has opened up a new area of research. Fricker's analysis of sexual harassment is particularly important since it illustrates how victims' collective experiences led to the creation of new concepts that challenged epistemic injustice. The investigation in this thesis is crucial due to a contradictory or unintuitive result of Fricker's framework: Although she has inspired a consideration of how victim narratives can reshape moral discourse, her own ways to address epistemic injustice remain focused on the perpetrator's perspective.[4]

This type of observation was promoted when reading Gary Watson's "Two Faces of Responsibility" (1987), in which Watson presents the case of Robert Harris. Harris was a serial killer whose traumatic victimization during childhood complicates straightforward judgments of moral blameworthiness. The example highlights how social practices and moral intuitions are shaped by the interplay of victimhood and wrongdoing, a complexity often neglected in philosophical debates. Harris is both a victim and a perpetrator, and this intersection of identities is one of the things that causes us to hesitate about his agency and blameworthiness. This is another one of the examples in the philosophical literature that has prompted me to critically examine whether the moral responsibility discourse sufficiently accommodates the victim's perspective and what is lost when it does not.[5]

In this endeavor, I am not alone. Others have also explored this path. Several contemporary philosophers have begun to incorporate the victim's perspective within moral responsibility debates. For instance, Edlich (2023), Talbert

[4] Of course, it can be suggested that Fricker actually suggests that given that epistemic injustice and its implication is a vice of the perpetrators it is their responsibility to fix their behaviour. Even if this is a reasonable demand, it often fails to address that perpetrators do not or will not actively change their behaviour or even admit that they are doing anything wrong to begin with. Questions like "what should the victim of epistemic injustice do" are not considered.

[5] These are two examples that impacted my view. There are many other examples that can have a similar impact.

(2012; 2009; 2016), and Talbert & Wolfendale (2019) have explicitly addressed victim-centered approaches, thus signaling a growing awareness of this dimension within the philosophical debate. The work of these authors has not only provided inspiration for this thesis, but they have also provided a starting point for further philosophical research.

Margaret Urban Walker's *Moral Understandings* (2007) has been particularly influential in this line of research as well as in this thesis. Walker critiques static, abstract conceptions of morality that fail to capture the nuance of diverse experiences within communities. She proposes what she calls the expressive-collaborative model and introduces 'transparency testing' as a methodological tool to assess the coherence of moral claims and social practices, especially regarding inclusivity and fairness under nonideal conditions. The idea of transparency testing states that philosophers should first ask themselves where the moral terms they are using come from. Then they should reflect on what authority they might have to speak to in these terms and finally on whose experiences they represent.

Walker provides a vital framework for examining moral responsibility, emphasizing the importance of empirical observation alongside philosophical reflection. Although in my investigation, I do not often use empirical data, I have sought to use works that themselves make use of empirical evidence. However, as Walker notes, empirical data themselves must be critically assessed, given that data collection and interpretation often reflect prevailing biases and social power dynamics. This insight resonates with critiques from sociologists of science in general and from data ethics scholars in particular. Examples of the latter are D'Ignazio & Klein (2020) and Strengers (2020), who caution against uncritically accepting data or algorithms as neutral. Instead, both data collection and analysis can be biased, and that bias can be compounded through further data collection and analysis. For instance, D'Ignazio & Klein (2020) explore how predictive policing algorithms disproportionately target marginalized communities due to biased historical crime data.

Research along these lines suggests that we, as scholars, often accept the narrative of our scientific field without sufficiently questioning it. We see research and, in this case, philosophical research as abstract and objective. By consequence, the argument we produce from it has to have these characteristics too. However, as with empirical data, philosophical research lacks the objectivity and the abstraction that it is advertised to have.

The moral responsibility literature, influenced by Peter Strawson's seminal "Freedom and Resentment" (1962/2008), has shifted focus toward social reactive attitudes like resentment and guilt. Traditionally, this debate centered on whether moral responsibility is compatible with determinism: Compatibilists argue that individuals can be held morally responsible even if determinism is true, while incompatibilists maintain that genuine responsibility requires free will in a sense that is not compatible with determinism. Strawson redirected the discussion by suggesting that our practices of holding one another responsible are grounded not in metaphysical theories, but in the interpersonal attitudes and expectations that structure human relationships. Strawson's paper became the basis for the research on moral responsibility. There are many interpretations and explanatory papers that use the strawsonian paradigm as the background. This has of course meant a tremendous shift in the debate, and it has created space to explore issues that are relevant for members of vulnerable groups and blame attributions.

Although this shift was impactful, many scholars, including Kate Manne (2020) and Michelle Ciurria (2020; 2023), have highlighted how these strawsonian frameworks often fail to adequately account for power imbalances and the victim's vulnerable social position. Pamela Hieronymi (2001; 2019) has enriched this discussion further by framing blame as a response that not only targets the perpetrator but also recognizes the victim's moral worth and the harm done to them. Together, such contributions to the debate suggest the necessity of a broader, more inclusive approach to moral responsibility, one that acknowledges the perspectives and experiences of all affected parties, especially the victims.

After acknowledging these types of work as inspiration, we now go back to the aim of the thesis. Using scholarly works, such as Manne's and Ciurria's combined with Walker's emphasis on transparency and empirical engagement, this thesis critically examines traditional moral responsibility theories to assess their inclusiveness regarding victim perspectives. This work questions whether existing frameworks adequately represent the potentially diverse, lived experiences of those who have been harmed, or whether these theories rely on abstract, idealized assumptions that overlook or marginalize certain voices. Finally, this thesis considers the possibility that such established frameworks may unintentionally reinforce forms of epistemic and moral exclusion since they fail to represent how power dynamics, social identities, and structural inequalities shape moral relationships and thus moral responsibility itself.

By acknowledging philosophical and epistemic limitations, especially due to the fact that philosophers are embedded within specific social and intellectual

traditions, this project adopts a reflective and critical stance. Thus, rather than prescribing how people should live, this thesis seeks to illuminate how integrating victim experiences improves moral understanding and practical deliberations. By centering the victim's viewpoint, this thesis aims to broaden philosophical inquiry, encouraging moral philosophers to ask essential questions about fairness, power dynamics and imbalances, and social justice within moral responsibility. Ultimately, it advocates for a rebalancing of moral discourse that better reflects the complexities of human social life.

Main claims

This thesis examines a victim-based approach to addressing issues regarding moral responsibility and blame. The main claim of the thesis is to first underline a standpoint, namely that of the victim's, that was missing from the literature of moral responsibility. I thus explore the victim's perspective as an underdeveloped complement to analyses that focus on the morality, responsibility, or blameworthiness of the perpetrator. Furthermore, I seek to provide a paradigm that can address those missing parts, and finally to point out examples of how such a paradigm can be applied in current issues discussed in the corresponding literature. As stated in the previous section, the idea of focusing on the victim's perspective, which I am going to develop in this thesis, has been proposed by Talbert (2012; 2009; 2016), and Talbert & Wolfendale (2019). It has been discussed in Edlich (2023), who highlights its relevance for contemporary debates in moral philosophy. Furthermore, the thought that we need to think about the victims as much as the perpetrators when we approach issues of moral responsibility has surfaced in various works, for example Manne (2018), Ciurria (2020), Walker (2006; 2007), and Hutchison, Mackenzie, & Oshana (2018). Most notably, Margaret Urban Walker's relational approach to responsibility (2006) highlights the importance of including victims in moral discourse, emphasizing that responsibility is not just about individual agents but about the network of social relationships in which harm occurs.

As moral philosophers, we often begin with intuition and explore how various philosophical theories apply to different cases. As I mentioned before, I hold that this is a reasonable way of thinking, we know better the things or the situations that are linked to us. Although I do not believe that this practice, namely of investigating or writing what one is more familiar with, is inherently problematic, I do suggest that it can lead to certain experiences and

perspectives being more frequently prioritized over others. This might especially be the case when these research and writing patterns are paired with the demographics of contemporary academic philosophy.[6]

This is not a new worry, of course. Thomas Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) developed the idea that scientific progress is not a linear journey towards the truth, but that it includes a series of shifts between different paradigms. According to Kuhn, these scientific paradigms dominate during certain periods of time and provide the set of problems that are meaningfully studied within each discipline. The paradigms are seen as guidelines and restrictions for the research and the corresponding researchers. As Kuhn suggests, it is plausible, in certain fields, that researchers continue developing ideas and ways of thinking and knowing that they have inherited from their predecessors. Thus, we end up seeing similar patterns within the discipline, which are characterized by the restrictions of what belongs and does not belong in the discipline.[7]

In addition to this suggestion of an epistemic paradigm, we can add another worry. As Kristie Dotson (2013) has argued, philosophy continues to struggle with what she calls a culture of justification, a tendency to privilege abstract reasoning while marginalizing lived experience and social context. This approach assumes that philosophy should remain highly abstract and detached from individual perspectives, often at the expense of those whose voices are already underrepresented in the discipline. This worry is echoing Walker's criticism about the abstract viewpoints of morality that fail to capture the nuances of diverse experiences within communities.

These two points can become critical when we think about the trajectory that moral philosophy can take. In my view, this situation becomes evident in cases when theories that have been part of the responsibility debate have led to moral judgments, which in turn have had quite unfortunate implications. In certain situations, these types of abstract arguments seem to become more like thought games for academics than serious moral dilemmas. Let me elaborate.

There are theories of moral responsibility, which deny the judgments of responsibility in certain behaviors despite a strong intuitive sense that these individuals have done something wrong for which they should be held

[6] As the data from the APA Blog suggest there is underrepresentation in the discipline of philosophy (Schwitzgebel, 2020).

[7] This becomes particularly important when we have to think about the moral responsibility literature and the role of the victims in blame judgments.

responsible. In these cases, while our moral intuition tells us that someone ought to be blamed for a harmful action, the theoretical framework may conclude that, due to a lack of normative competence, the harm-doer is not morally responsible, thereby creating a tension between theory and moral experience. For example, Susan Wolf (1987) presents the case of Jojo, the son of an evil dictator. Jojo has been raised to adopt the ways of his evil father while he is isolated from other influences. The question Wolf poses is whether JoJo truly can be held morally responsible for his harmful actions. The answer does not seem to be straightforward. Normative competence, which denotes as a person's ability to understand, respond to, or act in accordance with moral or normative reasons is significantly impaired or altogether absent in such situations. Thus, this person cannot make judgments about what makes actions right or wrong, and therefore he cannot be eligible for responsibility attribution.

An application of the normative competence claim has been linked to issues of upbringing (Talbert, 2016). How you were raised, and your formative years can actually leave you with moral blind spots. It has been suggested that people cannot be blamed for their actions when acting out of ignorance of this sort or held responsible for their blind spots if they are not connected to culpable ignorance (Levy, 2009). Similarly, there are discussions about how people's responsibility judgments can be affected by beliefs that come as a by-product of their culture (Moody-Adams, 1994; Wolf, 2003). Where one lives and the community in which one is raised are key factors that shape an individual's moral outlook and belief systems, potentially affecting their capacity to recognize certain moral wrongs. David Shoemaker (2015) further explores how social environments, and upbringing can undermine moral agency by creating these moral blind spots.

There is, of course, intuitive force behind such an argument. As children, we do not have power or control over the stimuli we are exposed to. It seems natural that we cannot be blamed for something that is outside our control, and which can develop later into a moral blind spot. Of course, it is also true that not every difference in upbringing or moral exposure will lead to a moral blind spot. However, sometimes this happens. Moral blind spots are developed, and they remain persistent in the person's life. It will probably appear obvious to anyone who has reflected on the conditions of their own upbringing, that this is a compelling argument because at least to some extent we all are influenced by the way that we have been brought up. Despite the argument's strength, it still focuses on one side of the issue at stake only. When there is a case of moral harm, then in most cases, there will be a wrongdoer and a victim. However, in

philosophical discussions about moral responsibility, upbringing and its impact on normative competence, the role of the victim is frequently overlooked, not only in attributing blame but also in influencing how blame is distributed and interpreted within moral contexts.

Excusing or exempting wrongdoers from blaming responses based solely on their normative competence can mean that the victims cannot blame the people who wrongfully harmed them.[8] Although such lines of investigations are significant and interesting they are often conducted in a way that can give specific details about the perpetrator's life but that does not really tell us anything about the reactions and responses of the victim. It can be stipulated that this makes sense as a matter of scope—why would we want to know anything about a person that is not in our research focus? However, often our research focus is making judgements about, among others, moral responsibility and different types of blame. These types of judgements can rarely be made with a one-sided focus on the perpetrator. Other people are involved in the moral relationship, namely victims, so neglecting the victims is unjustified from a methodological perspective.

From the perspective of the victim, the wrongdoing has hurt them.[9] The experience of hurt does not necessarily change if the wrongdoer could be excused or exempt from responsibility and blame. If we consider blaming the wrongdoer as inappropriate, then we are to a great extent restricting the responses that the victims are allowed to adopt. Such a restriction limits the victim and prioritizes the moral significance of the perpetrator since the perpetrator's fair treatment is considered more important than the victim's experience of hurt. Taking the victim's perspective can lead to the recognition of other reasons to blame which do not solely track the perpetrator's situation; on the contrary, victims can blame the wrongdoers simply because of the harm that has been inflicted on them. Blame can be seen as the basis of any demand for acknowledgment and compensation and cannot just depend on the circumstances of the perpetrators, which could be considered secondary.

Specific moral experiences cannot just be prioritized and treated as more important without justification. The exclusion of the experiences of the victims

[8] Of course, the victim can still blame the wrongdoer even if others, for example, the moral community and the perpetrator. However, the victims might find themselves been blamed for not respecting moral judgments. This can be especially difficult, when victims need support to overcome the harm and they get unsolicited advice about how they should behave towards the perpetrator, instead.

[9] There can be harm without a wrongdoer, but I am not going to examine these cases here.

from philosophical accounts requires careful justification because their perspectives are crucial for fully understanding the complexities of moral responsibility and blame. Without including victims, these accounts risk overlooking important dimensions of moral experience, such as the impact of harm and the relational dynamics between wrongdoers and those affected. Bernard Williams's (1995) discussion of reactive attitudes like blame and shame further supports this idea by emphasizing the communal and interpersonal functions of moral emotions, thus stressing why victims' responses matter in moral philosophy.

This echoes Charles Mills's (1997) critique in *The Racial Contract*, which shows how systemic social injustices embed moral blind spots that traditional moral theories often overlook. In such cases, people may act in ways that are harmful or discriminatory without fully grasping the moral significance of their behavior, raising complex questions about their responsibility. Similarly, Susan Okin (1989) raised a similar critique to John Rawls (2005). In her emphasis of the private sphere, Okin argued that what happens within the family structure must not be excluded from moral evaluation. The family should be evaluated in virtue of fairness in the same way as the state. Arguably, these types of exclusions are not only hurting the people that they exclude, but they also limit the understating that we might achieve of the situation. Mills's and Okin's work broaden their respective lines of research by bringing into focus issues that were otherwise overlooked.

I view the victim's perspective as part of a framework for analyses of moral relations, responsibility, blame, and harm, which can complement and balance considerations of the perpetrator. The perspective can suggest that some implications of certain accounts are not acceptable with regard to the victim's well-being. For example, excusing wrongdoing based solely on the wrongdoer's background, be it his or her upbringing or cultural norms; expecting victims to forgive without sufficient acknowledgment of their suffering; and underrepresenting or omitting the victim's emotional responses, such as anger, from the moral analysis. Finally, treating the victims as members of the community is an important aim with independent values. By acknowledging the perspective of the victim, we are treating victims with respect and showing to them that we as a moral community acknowledge their moral worth inasmuch as we acknowledge the wrongdoers.

The Victim's Perspective

This section presents my understanding of the victim's perspective. Although unavoidably there will be some repetition, given that I do discuss the this in "The victim's perspective: How thinking about the victim can provide answers to philosophical issues of responsibility," I here elaborate on the perspective from more perspectives than can be explored within the restrictions of one article. I first describe the main argumentation of the victim's perspective. I then clarify that the victims do not have to blame their perpetrators, but that they have the option to do so, and that some situations can present instinctive alternatives to blame. However, I also suggest that there often are strong reasons why the victims would want to blame.

Importantly, my view is that the victim's perspective offers a way to rebalance moral considerations, given that the literature on moral responsibility has been focused on the perpetrator. By putting the victim in the center, I do not try to eliminate the perspective of the perpetrator. Instead, I seek to offer acknowledgement and recognition to the victims. This does not bar the importance of examining the perpetrator's perspective. Instead, it is crucial to incorporate multiple perspectives, including those of victims, wrongdoers, and broader social contexts, which are all essential aspects if we wish to develop a richer and more just account of moral responsibility.

In a nutshell, the victim's perspective is the following: When a moral harm is done, the victim can blame the perpetrator. If the perpetrator is somehow excused or exempted from responsibility, the standard account suggests that the victim cannot blame the perpetrator in virtue of the excuse or exemption. An account that focuses on the victim's perspective suggests that the victim can blame the perpetrator in virtue of the perpetrator's connection to the act that harmed them (the victims). In such a case the victim may have a moral right to compensation from the perpetrator.

The type of harm that I am focusing on in the thesis are systematic or recurrent. They can be microaggressions and microinsults. I do not aim to examine cases where the harm was accidental, for example when I stepped on you in the bus, or incidental or unique, for example that time when you stole my bike. My aim is to examine harms that contribute to systematic injustice and power imbalances.

A further clarification is whether the victims have to blame the perpetrator. The answer is no; the victims do not have to blame the perpetrators if the

victims do not want to. Victims are in the right to choose which moral response they wish to adopt.

In my first paper "The victim's perspective: How thinking about the victim can provide answers to philosophical issues of responsibility" I argue that we need blame to demand compensation and for the victims to be acknowledged. However, it should be perfectly conceivable that victims can blame if they want to, but that they might rightly demand acknowledgement or compensation even without blaming.

Nonetheless, I strongly believe that victims should be encouraged to blame. Blame can be a useful response. Pamela Hieronymi (2001) describes how blame can function as a moral demand for acknowledgment of the victim's moral agency. Thus blame, according to Hieronymi, is not merely an expression of negative feelings but a way of calling attention to a moral failure that requires recognition and redress. When someone is blamed, they are being called to acknowledge the harm they have caused and possibly explain their reasoning for making such a poor choice. Ignoring or dismissing this demand can have significant consequences, potentially undermining the possibility of genuine forgiveness and reconciliation, which are necessary for repairing relationships. Moreover, Linda Radzik's (2010) analysis of blame highlights its expressive and relational aspects, emphasizing how blame is directed toward repair and acknowledgment within moral communities. In addition, Eva Feder Kittay's (1999) ethics of care also stresses the importance of recognizing vulnerability and dependency, adding weight to why victims' experiences should be centered in these discussions. Thus, blame can work as a healing response for some victims.

Victims may not want to blame their perpetrators for various reasons, for example, out of fear of retaliation. If there is structural injustice or power imbalances in society, it might be burdensome or even unthinkable that the victim could blame a perpetrator. In certain situations, perpetrators cannot be reached, morally or socially. Although such reasons can force a victim to refrain from blame, I maintain that at least at a moral level the victim should be able to blame. In recent contributions such as Cherry (2023) and Eddo-Lodge (2017), claim that victims of racism and sexism often are encouraged to adopt more moderate and less extreme responses toward the perpetrator and the underlying structure of power imbalances in which the wrongdoing is embedded. For example, victims are not supposed to not show anger, to keep their head low and to accept the situation with a profound acceptance. As the aforementioned authors, I would like to discourage this practice.

Thus, I suggest that third parties, like well-meaning relatives or other members of society, should also stop advising victims to refrain from blaming or forgiving. Victims should not be revictimized by silencing or suppressing their experiences and pain. If victims make an informed decision about what they wish to do, they can choose to morally criticize instead of blaming.

Third party interventions can be helpful under certain circumstances. There are many cases in which perpetrators are either unwilling or unable to compensate victims, or even to acknowledge or recognize the harm they have caused. In such instances, compensation may come from third parties, such as the state, institutions, or other members or representatives of a community. When I refer to third-party compensation in my work, I mean actions taken by individuals or entities who are not directly involved in the moral relationship of blame, because they are neither the victim nor the perpetrator. Although these third parties do not actively take part in the moral exchange, they can still play a meaningful role by acknowledging the harm and offering support to the victim, or by acting as mediators who may facilitate the shared understanding of perpetrator and victim.

Importantly, third-party intervention can help to identify and restore the victim's moral and social standing, particularly in cases where the perpetrator refuses to recognize his or her responsibility. As Walker (2006) argues, repair is not merely about material compensation but about recognizing and affirming moral personhood in the wake of harm. Importantly, I do not suggest that third-party compensation holds the same moral weight or meaning as acknowledgment or redress from the perpetrator themselves. In some situations, especially when perpetrators appear to thrive socially despite the harm they have inflicted, third-party gestures may feel hollow or even patronizing to victims (Murphy 2010).

While third-party compensation can provide a practical or symbolic form of redress, it should not become the normative standard. Doing so risks marginalizing victims further and offering perpetrators an undue escape from moral accountability. That said, in cases where the perpetrator is deceased or otherwise incapable of making amends, third-party compensation may be the only viable avenue for recognition and repair (Pasternak 2021). In this way, third-party acts, although limited, can still serve as expressions of solidarity and support on behalf of the broader community, helping to affirm shared values and uphold the victim's status as a moral agent.

In this sense, third-party intervention and compensation can provide an alternative moral response that prioritizes recognition, despite the perpetrator's

unwillingness to acknowledge the moral harm they might have done. When the third-party acts as a mediator, finally, this might lead to the shared recognition and understanding of the parties, at least one of whom for different might have refused to fully or at all acknowledge the harm. In particular, third-party mediators might help making perpetrators recognize the justified blameworthiness of their action, perhaps in (indirect) dialogue with the victim. Likewise, third-party mediators might help the victim identify more exactly what the blameworthiness in the harm consists of.

Along similar lines, it is important to establish that there are other moral responses that do not involve blame. For example, Robin Zheng (2021) offers a helpful framework for understanding moral criticism, which can help the agents respond to structural injustice when blame is not an option. Zheng distinguishes between summative and formative criticism. Summative moral criticism evaluates an agent's actions against established moral standards and is often associated with judgments like blame. Formative criticism, however, focuses on guiding moral growth, particularly in contexts where wrongdoing is shaped by ignorance, habit, or structural constraints. This distinction helps illuminate how one might engage in moral critique when blame seems to be beyond our scope. For example, one can criticize harmful cultural practices, such as discriminatory dress codes or exclusionary norms, without blaming individuals who unknowingly perpetuate them. In such cases, formative criticism encourages reflection and transformation rather than condemnation.

Thus, it is important for victims in vulnerable groups to have a wide range of moral responses to injustice and moral harm when blame cannot be an option. This leads me to the idea that moral protest can be another moral response that victims can adopt towards systematic perpetrators. I examine such a case in "Rethinking Moral Protest: Supporting Vulnerable Groups Beyond Blame."

Main concepts

Clarity and consistency of terminology are essential for philosophical analysis. In this section, I will try to provide comprehensive descriptions of the terms I will use throughout the thesis. Here I aim to restrict and specify how I will be using these terms in order to enhance the clarity of the thesis. Moreover, by defining these concepts, I situate them within broader philosophical and social frameworks, while trying to link them within a victim-centred account of moral responsibility. A few of the word choices and definitions demand

argumentation, others will be seen as more straightforward. This variation reflects the extent to which my understanding of the concepts aligns, or diverges, from existing literature.

I start by defining the concept of moral responsibility, blameworthiness and praiseworthiness. Moral responsibility and blameworthiness are the basis for this thesis, and they will be a recurrent area of interest in all of the papers in this thesis. Praiseworthiness is an important concept for my discussion in the paper "Victim Blaming, Justified Risks, and Imperfect Victims." I proceed by defining the concept of blame. I try to restrict this definition to the needs of this thesis given blame's complicated nature and its critical role in the moral responsibility literature, is beyond the scope of this work. I am discussing blame with its connection to moral demand and praise.

I continue by explaining my usage of the terms harmful and wrongful acts, harm and hurt, as well as events and acts, which are terms that are going to be used throughout the thesis. I then define the concepts of the perpetrator, the victim and the moral community, all three being relevant to every paper of the thesis.

I never explicitly go into depth about reactive attitudes (see the above discussion of Strawson), however I make use of moral responses which I view as a closely aligned concept. Given that I consider possible moral responses, I also define moral protest. In addition, I will discuss the distinction between social and moral norms. Moreover, I discuss the concept of standpoint, given that I find this concept aligned with a person's perspective of reasoning. These distorting influences often manifest themselves in victim-blaming, a phenomenon that I also investigate in "Victim Blaming, Justified Risks, and Imperfect Victims." Finally, I consider the concept of moral repair, a concept that gains particular relevance in the paper "Understanding the Process of Forgiving."

Moral Responsibility, Blameworthiness and Praiseworthiness

Talbert (2016) notes that the terms "responsible" and "responsibility" are used in varied ways in everyday discourse, often indicating duty or obligation (pp. 6–8). However, across these usages, a unifying theme emerges: Individuals who fail to meet responsibilities become liable for certain moral responses. Within philosophical discussions, this liability is often associated with different expressions of blame or praise, depending on the moral quality of the agent's action.

McKenna (2012) calls attention to a distinction that is sometimes overlooked: agents can be morally responsible without necessarily being blameworthy or praiseworthy. Blame typically follows judgments of responsibility for wrongful conduct, while praise follows judgments of responsibility for morally commendable behavior (Talbert, 2022). But can we be morally responsible without necessarily being blameworthy or praiseworthy? To illustrate the issue, McKenna offers the case of a man who witnesses someone in distress. Helping the individual, despite significant personal risk, would be praiseworthy; exploiting the situation to steal would be blameworthy. Yet doing nothing, merely walking by, may be morally responsible conduct that is neither blameworthy nor praiseworthy (McKenna, 2012, pp. 16–17). In contrast, morally trivial actions, often automatic, habitual, or semi-conscious actions, like singing while cooking, may not even qualify as instances of moral responsibility.

This two-step model, first assessing moral responsibility, then considering blameworthiness or praiseworthiness, clarifies the normative stakes in attributing moral responses. Philosophers have further subdivided responsibility into finer conceptual distinctions (e.g., Watson's division between accountability and answerability (2004), or Shoemaker's tripartite schema (2011, 2015)). There is of course philosophical merit in being able to differentiate between types of responsibility. Nonetheless, I have not made use of these distinctions. I am skeptical about whether these distinctions are important for promoting the victim's recognition and well-being, and therefore I have not made use of them in this thesis.

While blameworthiness is in focus throughout this thesis, I also acknowledge praiseworthiness as its moral counterpart. Blame is often directed toward wrongdoers, whereas praise can be directed toward individuals who challenge harmful norms, especially when doing so comes at personal cost. For example, individuals who refuse to participate in victim-blaming narratives or who support victims in morally significant ways may be praiseworthy not just for their actions but also for disrupting established moral failures. In this way, praise becomes a valuable tool for highlighting moral courage, especially in contexts where silence or complicity is easier.

Recent work has expanded the literature on praiseworthiness in helpful ways. Telech (2021), Jeppsson and Brandenburg (2022), Lippert-Rasmussen (2021), and Holroyd (2024) all explore when praise is warranted and how social and moral conditions influence our assessments. While this thesis does not delve deeply into those debates, it adopts the view that moral responsibility includes

a spectrum of responses, and that both blame and praise must be understood in relation to the social dynamics in which they occur.

Importantly, a backward-looking account of blame, whether victim-centered or otherwise, generally presupposes a judgment of blameworthiness. Blame functions as a moral response to perceived wrongful harm, and the victim's demand for acknowledgment typically rests on the idea that the wrongdoer is judged to be at fault for past wrongdoing. However, it is worth noting that blame can sometimes serve as a communicative or expressive response, even in cases where full moral blameworthiness is philosophically contested or complicated by factors such as normative competence or mitigating circumstances. In such instances, blame remains a backward-looking evaluative expression grounded in the victim's experience of harm and their demand for recognition and repair, even if the judgment of blameworthiness is not unequivocally affirmed on epistemic or even metaphysical grounds.

In sum, this framework allows for a more nuanced treatment of responsibility. It also supports the broader aim of this thesis, which is to complement the focus on the perpetrator by putting the victim's perspective in moral theorizing front and center and to highlight the relational dimensions of our moral practices, whether in blame, praise, or interpersonal acknowledgment.

Blame, Moral Demand and Praise

This thesis advances a victim-centered account of blame, emphasizing its function as a moral response that serves the needs and perspectives of those harmed. Insofar it diverges from previous theories that have variously conceptualized blame as affective responses (Strawson, 1962/2008), judgments of impaired moral relationships (Scanlon, 2008), or expressions of recognition or protest (Macnamara, 2013; Hieronymi, 2001). A central feature of this account is that, notwithstanding its varied expressions, the fundamental function of blame, especially when considered from the victim's perspective, is to articulate a moral demand for acknowledgment and redress. This claim positions my view between the poles of a fully unitary and a fully pluralistic theory of blame.

On one hand, I do not deny that blame can take many forms: it may be emotional, such as resentment or anger (Strawson, 1962/2008); Deonna, Rodogno, & Teroni, 2012); cognitive, involving judgments or beliefs about wrongdoing (Malle, Guglielmo, & Monroe, 2014); relational, affecting trust and interpersonal dynamics (McGeer, 2013); or even social and behavioral, including calls for accountability and sanctions (Coates & Tognazzini, 2012; Hieronymi, 2001). In this sense, my view accommodates the plurality of blame

responses described by philosophers who stress that blame encompasses a wide array of attitudes and actions.

On the other hand, I also argue that this diversity is unified by a core function, particularly in moral contexts involving interpersonal harm: Blame, as exercised by victims, serves as a moral demand for recognition. This idea is supported by Strawson's (1962/2008) account of reactive attitudes as demands for respect, and by Watson's (2004) notion that blame expresses the moral expectations we place on one another. In this way, the expressive function of blame is not just about moral evaluation; it is about securing the victim's moral standing within a shared community.

Moreover, I want to argue that blame plays a scaffolding role within moral communities, it not only registers disapproval or protest but helps shape and sustain the development of moral agency. Following McGeer (2013), I will suggest that blame can function as a form of moral guidance and support, aimed at helping others recognize their responsibilities and improve their moral responsiveness. From this perspective, the victim's expression of blame is not simply retributive or expressive, but also potentially constructive, encouraging moral growth in the wrongdoer and reinforcing the community's shared values. This scaffolding role of blame becomes especially salient in cases where perpetrators are embedded in unjust social structures that may have limited their moral insight or awareness. In such cases, blame acts both as a protest and an invitation to reengage with moral norms.

Unlike Scanlon (2008), who separates the act of blaming from the moral demand for acknowledgment, I argue that the two are intimately connected, especially when considering the experience of the victim. Thus, blame is not merely a judgment; it is a claim made by the wronged party, a protest against harm, a call for recognition, and a demand for repair. Macnamara's (2013) view that blame recognizes the moral significance of actions is helpful here, but I go further to assert that blame functions normatively, not simply descriptively, as a form of moral communication that insists on the wrongdoer's response and, potentially, moral growth.

Importantly, then, I am not offering a metaphysically unitary theory of blame that excludes other interpretations. Rather, I offer a functionally unified account, one that centers the victim's role and shows how blame, in its morally significant form, is bound up with the demand for acknowledgment, the restoration of the victim's moral standing, and the cultivation of moral agency.

This framing also aligns with the broader goals of this thesis, namely, to bring forward the lived experiences of victims and (2) to assess whether mainstream

accounts of moral responsibility have overlooked or sidelined these experiences. By placing victims at the center of our theories of blame and responsibility, we can develop a richer and more inclusive moral framework, one that takes harm, acknowledgment, and repair seriously, while also recognizing the transformative potential of moral protest. One that is compatible with different social situations.

While this thesis primarily focuses on blame as a response to moral harm, it is again important to briefly acknowledge its positive counterpart: praise. Just as blame communicates a moral demand for acknowledgment and accountability, praise expresses moral approval and recognition of a person's positive actions or character. Following Strawson's (1962/2008) account of reactive attitudes, praise, like gratitude or admiration, can be seen as a way of affirming shared moral expectations within a community. Watson (2004) also highlights that both blame and praise are part of the broader framework of holding others accountable, reflecting our ongoing moral engagement with one another. Though less frequently analyzed in the literature, praise plays a crucial role in sustaining moral relationships by reinforcing behaviors and attitudes that align with communal values and ethical standards.

Responsibility Without Blame

In much of moral philosophy, holding someone responsible is often assumed to entail blaming them. Blame is treated as a natural response to wrongdoing. However, contemporary theorists such as Hanna Pickard and Andrea Westlund, along with others like T.M. Scanlon, Gary Watson, and Marilyn Frye, challenge this assumption. They propose models of responsibility without blame, which preserve moral accountability while avoiding the negative emotional and punitive dimensions typically associated with blame.

Hanna Pickard (2011), drawing on her clinical work with individuals managing personality disorders, argues for a therapeutic approach that holds people responsible for their actions without resorting to blame. In her view, blame understood as an emotional stance involving anger, resentment, or moral condemnation, often undermines rehabilitation and moral growth. Instead, she advocates for a stance of "detached concern," which recognizes a person's agency and accountability without moral hostility. This framework has important implications for criminal justice, addiction treatment, and mental health care, where blame often obstructs recovery and transformation.

Andrea Westlund (2003, 2009) takes a relational and dialogical view of moral responsibility. For Westlund, responsibility is best understood in terms of answerability, the capacity to participate in moral dialogue, explain one's

actions, and be responsive to others' reasons. This framework emphasizes mutual recognition rather than condemnation. Especially in contexts of social inequality, historical injustice, or interpersonal dependency, blame can reinforce power imbalances. Westlund shows that moral engagement need not involve affective blame but can instead be grounded in mutual respect and open dialogue.

Expanding this discussion, Derk Pereboom (2001, 2014) presents a hard incompatibilist account of responsibility. Specifically, he argues that because human behavior is ultimately shaped by factors beyond our control (e.g., genetics, environment, luck), we are never morally responsible in the basic desert sense, that is, in a way that would justify blame or punishment purely for its own sake. However, Pereboom does not embrace moral nihilism. Instead, he proposes that we retain practices like moral admonition, encouragement, and moral protest, but without concomitant retributive blame. According to him, forward-looking attitudes, such as protection, rehabilitation, and reconciliation, are sufficient to sustain interpersonal and legal practices of accountability, suitably understood.

These views reflect a broader movement away from retributive models of blame toward constructive, dialogical, and restorative forms of responsibility. This shift aligns with critiques from Scanlon (2008), who distinguishes between the judgment that someone acted wrongly and the emotional stance of blaming them. It also aligns with critiques from Watson (2004), who questions the universality of reactive attitudes in morally complex situations. For example, in certain tragic circumstances it might be inappropriate or even harmful to respond with typical reactive attitudes, like resentment.

Philosophers like Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000) further support this view by emphasizing relational autonomy, the idea that agency is always shaped by social conditions. This has critical implications for vulnerable individuals or for those people from marginalized groups who may lack the freedom to make fully autonomous choices and who are still held responsible for their actions. The danger in these cases is that rather than facilitating meaningful moral repair, blame may function as a social weapon, a way of reinforcing such norms and hierarchies that can perpetuate power imbalances that in turn may prevent redress. This insight is echoed by Walker (2006), who emphasizes the role of moral repair after wrongdoing. Her account suggests that moral responsibility should aim at rebuilding trust and restoring relationships, which is often undermined by blame.

In all these accounts, we see a common theme: responsibility need not involve blame to be morally effective. On the contrary, blame, when understood as a hostile or condemnatory response, can hinder the very goals of responsibility, such as moral growth, restoration, and reconciliation. Thus, especially in contexts involving trauma, mental illness, or systemic injustice, responsibility without blame may instead be the only morally justifiable stance.

Harm, Hurt and Insult

In this thesis, I use the term harm to refer to events or actions involving both a perpetrator and a victim. While philosophical debates around so-called "victimless crimes" do exist (see for example Devlin (1965) and Feinberg (1984)), they fall outside the scope of this work. I use the terms harm and hurt more or less interchangeably, though I acknowledge that harm often carries a more objective and legalistic connotation, whereas hurt tends to be more subjective and emotionally expressive. Nonetheless, both terms are meant to capture experiences of moral injury or interpersonal violation.[10]

I also include insult within this spectrum, drawing here especially on the literature on microaggressions. This literature demonstrates how seemingly minor or ambiguous slights can accumulate over time and have significant psychological and moral impact (Sue et al. 2007; Nadal 2020). What may appear minimal or socially inconsequential in isolation can, when repeated or contextualized within systems of inequality, constitute a serious violation of a person's dignity and well-being. For this reason, understand microaggressive acts not as trivial, but as morally significant forms of harm.[11] I hold that the examples discussed in "Rethinking Moral Protest: Supporting Vulnerable Groups Beyond Blame" fall under the category of microaggressions.

[10] Of course, I believe that there can be moral harm that is not explicitly experienced. One can be morally harmed by people taking advantage of one behind one's back or even taking advantage of someone when one is unconscious. While these are cases of moral harm, I will not be examining such examples.

[11] There are a few clarifications to be made, for example the difference between harmful and wrongful acts. My linguistic intuition suggests that wrongfulness is more legalized harm that would be more obvious and that a harmful act can be similar but go unnoticed. I will use them interchangeably. Likewise, I will use the concepts of event and act interchangeably. My intuition is that when researchers use event instead of act, they are indicating that either there was no perpetrator, or the perpetrator is for some reason not in focus, or no one is to be linked to the act or be blamed for it. Future research can explore if there are distinctions related to these concepts that can contribute further to a victim-based perspective.

The Perpetrator and the Wrongdoer

For the purposes of this thesis, I do not distinguish between the terms perpetrator and wrongdoer. My linguistic understanding is that a perpetrator is a more methodical individual who planned to harm the victim. The term wrongdoer seemingly refers to a broader range of harm that might have been done by accident. I use both to refer to an individual who has caused wrongful harm or committed a moral transgression against another, whether intentionally, directly, or through complicity in broader structural conditions.

My use of these terms also reflects a feminist concern with how harm is embedded in systems of power, as articulated by theorists such as Catharine MacKinnon (1989), who shows how acts of violence and subordination are often normalized within patriarchal institutions. Similarly, Hilde Lindemann (2014) argues that moral identity, including that of the wrongdoer, is constituted through social practices and relationships, rather than being merely a matter of individual intention. For the wrongdoer, their sense of themselves as a moral being is influenced by how others respond to their actions, whether through resentment, forgiveness, or acceptance.

Victims, Survivors and Vulnerable Groups

Throughout this thesis, I use the term victim to challenge the stigma often attached to victimhood in moral discourse. Drawing on feminist insights into structural harm and relational autonomy (e.g., Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000), I argue that recognizing someone as a victim should not diminish their agency but instead call attention to the unjust conditions under which harm occurs. From this perspective, victimhood is not a static identity but a situated moral and political position. In using the term victim, I include those who are injured, offended, or harmed in ways that are structurally mediated, morally significant, and politically consequential, whether that harm is physical, psychological, epistemic, or relational in nature.

When individuals who have experienced harm prefer the term survivor, I respect and adopt that language in specific contexts, in line with feminist commitments to self-definition and epistemic agency (Fricker, 2007). However, for the sake of clarity in broader philosophical discussions, I primarily use victim.

For the needs of this thesis, I also use victim interchangeably with members of a vulnerable group, referring to those who are systematically and recurrently exposed to harm due to structural, social, or contextual forces. Through such exposure, it can be argued that members of these groups are in a permanent,

latent state of victimhood, understood as an increased likelihood to become or remain the targets of different kinds of harm. By consequence, their state of victimhood may be exacerbated in specific situations when that harm is actualized. For instance, the targets of sexual harassment is most often women, a fact that many women (and men) are aware of and that women must take into account. That does not mean that all women are always sexually harassed. Instead, they are victims of a structural injustice that may or may not manifest itself, and if it does, the manifestation will be more or less acute in individual situations. This framing aligns with feminist analyses of patterned vulnerability and structural injustice (Young, 1990), emphasizing that vulnerability is often produced and maintained by intersecting systems of oppression.

An important question is who can be seen as a victim. In *Down Girl* (2018), Kate Manne examines the incel, or involuntary celibate phenomenon through the lens of misogyny. Manne argues that incels view women as owing them sex, or moral support, and when these expectations are unmet, and from their perspectives they are the victims of societal status and circumstances. Should we also consider incels as victims and include them in a victim-centered account of responsibility? For the purposes of this thesis, I distinguish individuals such as incels from the victims examined in this study. The former group experiences the loss of a privilege that is in no way any else's obligation to maintain, which is a product of an unjust world, whereas the latter group is systematically victimized through the loss of their rights as moral agents.

(Moral) community

The concept of a moral community can be interpreted in multiple ways, reflecting different theoretical and normative commitments. This concept is important for "The Victim's Perspective: How Thinking About the Victim Can Provide Answers to Philosophical Issues of Responsibility" given that Mr. Potter seems to be part of the community a wide sense, he interacts with other people but at the same time he does not acknowledge them as moral peers. Similarity in "Rethinking Moral Protest: Supporting Vulnerable Groups Beyond Blame," it is unclear if the sexist father belongs to the same moral community with the daughter.

For some, moral community refers to an already-existing group bound by shared norms or practices; for others, it serves as a theoretical ideal, an aspirational vision of moral relation (Babst, 2011). According to Russell (2018), the idea of moral community rests on the notion that we, as rational and free agents, are governed by similar moral demands, particularly

concerning voluntariness and blame, and that we recognize one another as subject to those demands. In such a community, agents who voluntarily violate moral obligations are appropriately open to blame and other reactive attitudes.

In this thesis, I will refer to the (moral) community without aiming to produce a strict definition based on necessary or sufficient conditions for membership. I do this for two reasons. The first reason is that I want to leave room for the fluidity and diversity of moral communities in the way they emerge, evolve, and overlap in real life. The second reason is that by not setting a hard boundary, I want to suggest that agents may participate in some moral relations, for example dialogue but fail in others, for example fairness.

Rather, I take a more descriptive approach: moral communities, as I understand them, are formed by individuals who share certain values and understandings, even if they are not co-located in the same physical or cultural space. While my account is descriptive does not entail a prescriptive ideal, it carries important implications for how we understand responsibility, solidarity, and moral standing. I believe that even if I know that my friend has sexist beliefs, I would still be disappointed when that friend makes sexist comments about me. I would expect that friend to show some kind of support in virtue of our friendship.

However, the existence of echo chambers (Nguyen, 2020) and normative bubbles (Sunstein, 2009; 2017) complicates this picture. When individuals or groups are isolated within homogenous environments, where their beliefs and values are constantly reinforced and opposing views are excluded, shared understandings of moral permissibility can become fragmented or polarized. This raises the question: if parties disagree fundamentally about the moral permissibility of a certain conduct, can they genuinely hold each other morally blameworthy? Without some common ground or shared normative framework, blame risks becoming ineffective or misguided, as it may fail to resonate with the other party's moral perspective.

This is not to deny that people from different moral communities can blame one another, and in some cases, such blame may be intelligible or even persuasive within each party's own framework. However, I suggest that such cross-community blame is typically less effective, particularly in promoting moral change, understanding, or reconciliation. It may be heard but not truly felt as blame in the normative sense intended by the blamer. Thus, for blame to meaningful, a minimal overlap or mutual recognition within the moral community seems necessary. Otherwise, the practice of blame may lose its

normative force and risk deepening division rather than promoting moral understanding.

On this view, the threshold of when one is part of the community has to be dependent to a certain extent on the circumstances of the case. Some people may belong to the moral community in some sense and not in another. Mr. Potter does not care about how he treats his employees, but he can still converse with them and possibly hear their reasoning.

Reactive Attitudes and Moral Responses

According to Talbert (2024), reactive attitudes, understood as emotionally charged responses such as resentment, indignation, gratitude, and forgiveness, play a foundational role in our practices of holding one another morally responsible. These attitudes are not merely emotional reactions but serve as normative responses to others' moral regard, or lack thereof. This view builds on P.F. Strawson's influential account, in which our responsibility practices are fundamentally interpersonal and rooted in our natural responses to "the quality of others' wills towards us" (Strawson, 1962, p. 56). That is, we hold others responsible not simply because of the consequences of their actions, but because their actions express attitudes, such as ill will, disregard, or respect, that directly affect our moral relationships with them.

Watson (2004) expands on this idea by emphasizing that reactive attitudes arise within the context of normative relationships, where agents are seen as capable of understanding and responding to shared moral expectations. These attitudes are not reducible to mere affective states; rather, they express evaluative judgments about how we expect to be treated as members of a moral community. Macnamara (2015) further argues that reactive attitudes like blame and anger are ways of affirming those expectations; they are tools for sustaining the moral fabric of interpersonal life by demanding recognition and accountability.

In this thesis, I adopt a victim-centered perspective that highlights how reactive attitudes function as moral responses that enable victims to articulate and contest the harm they have suffered. This becomes clear in the papers, "The victim's perspective: How thinking about the victim can provide answers to philosophical issues of responsibility" and "Rethinking Moral Protest: Supporting Vulnerable Groups Beyond Blame." The claim is that blame and protest are not just about identifying wrongdoing, but that they carry relational implications that point forward to the need for restored trust or a reconfigured moral relationship. This resonates with discussions by Miranda Fricker and Pamela Hieronymi. As Fricker (2016) notes, blame is not only about

identifying wrongdoers but also about registering protest against violations of moral expectations, particularly from the standpoint of the person who has been wronged. Resentment and indignation, furthermore, can allow victims to signal that they have been treated with disregard, and that such treatment demands recognition and the possibility of moral repair (Hieronymi 2001).

Resentment and indignation, for example, can allow victims to signal that they have been treated with disregard, and that such treatment demands recognition and the possibility of moral repair. With others (see e.g. Hieronymi 2001 and Fricker 2016), I think that blame is not just about identifying wrongdoing, but they carry relational implications, pointing to the need for restored trust or a reconfigured moral relationship.

What is crucial for my victim-centered account, is to remain attentive to the power dynamics involved in moral relationships and offer a wide range of attitudes that the victims can adopt. Thus, from a relational, process-oriented perspective, reactive attitudes are best understood not only as affective responses but also as deeply normative expressions of moral protest, recognition, and relationship management. They allow victims to claim their moral standing and press for acknowledgment, especially in the aftermath of harm. In this thesis, I focus primarily on blame and praise as structured manifestations of these attitudes, while recognizing that their specific emotional forms may vary across cultural and interpersonal contexts. Ultimately, reactive attitudes give voice to the victim's perspective. They are ways in which the wronged demand to be seen, heard, and respected within the moral community. These demands may be individual or collective, more or less strongly organized, and more or less independent of existing institutions and rules.

Moral Protest

Moral protest is conceptually distinct from more familiar notions of political protest. As first introduced by Pamela Hieronymi (2001), moral protest is a form of moral blame that focuses on expressing opposition to wrongdoing, particularly in a way that centers the moral meaning of the act rather than the character of the wrongdoer. While Hieronymi does not explicitly connect blame with resentment, subsequent philosophers have often treated moral protest and reactive attitudes like resentment as closely linked (Pereboom 2017; Talbert 2012; Smith 2013; Edlich 2023).

In paper "Rethinking Moral Protest: Supporting Vulnerable Groups Beyond Blame" I argue for a victim-centered approach to responding to harm. Unlike

traditional forms of blame that often emphasize the moral failings of the wrongdoer, Hieronymi's concept of protest directs attention to the wrongful act itself. This shift in focus enables a form of moral expression that resists escalation and avoids the potentially punitive or excessive dimensions of conventional blame. In this way, protest functions as a morally appropriate response, one that affirms the victim's moral standing without necessarily intensifying conflict with the perpetrator.

While my account aligns closely with Hieronymi's, I do not propose replacing blame with moral protest entirely. Rather, I view moral protest as a supplementary response that broadens the available moral-reponse repertoire for victims. It provides space for expressing opposition to harm while allowing for varying degrees of emotional and moral engagement, particularly in contexts where standard blaming responses may be unavailable, or even counterproductive.

Moral protest can be understood as one among several forms of moral response to harm, alongside others such as moral criticism. Like moral criticism, protest expresses a judgment that some action was morally wrong. Although both responses aim to acknowledge wrongdoing and affirm moral norms, they have distinct targets. Moral criticism often targets the perpetrator in an evaluative tone. By contrast, moral protest, as articulated by Hieronymi, focuses more directly on the wrongness of the event and the need to affirm the victim's moral status without directly engaging the perpetrator.

Social and Moral Norms

For the needs of this thesis, moral and social norms have distinct but complementary roles. Moral norms establish the ethical standards that define and guide judgments about right and wrong treatment of victims and wrongdoers.

Social norms, by contrast, regulate everyday interactions and provide the practical framework. Ideally, in a just society, important moral decisions would be fully integrated into social norms, allowing individuals to belong to their diverse cultures and traditions without experiencing oppression or exclusion. However, we do not live in an ideal world, social norms often reflect and perpetuate power imbalances that can silence or marginalize victims. Therefore, understanding responsibility requires attending to the interplay

between moral ideals and the often-flawed social realities that shape how victimization is recognized and addressed.[12]

Standpoint (perspective)

The concept of a standpoint emphasizes that knowledge and understanding are often shaped by one's social position or perspective. It is important to understand that there are different perspectives, and they can influence how people see the world. There are many viewpoints from which we can interpret and evaluate experiences, and these diverse standpoints offer distinct insights that may not be equally accessible to everyone. This idea recognizes that many claims presented as objective knowledge are in actuality socially situated, meaning the claims rely on evidence, experiences, and interpretations that are more readily available to certain groups due to their unique social locations (Tanesini, 2019; Harding, 1991).

In employing the concept of standpoint, I specifically refer to an epistemic standpoint, the understanding that individuals' social identities influence the knowledge they can access. People belonging to marginalized or oppressed groups often gain critical insights into social realities that remain invisible or misunderstood by those outside their group. This epistemic advantage arises because their lived experiences provide them with a different, often more acute, awareness of systemic injustice, discrimination, and harm (Collins, 1990; Fricker, 2007).

For victims, standpoint epistemology has significant implications. It affirms the importance of centering victims' perspectives in moral and social discourse, recognizing that victims possess unique knowledge about the harm they have endured and the contexts in which it occurred. This challenges dominant narratives that may dismiss or invalidate victims' accounts, which often happen when knowledge is filtered through the perspectives of those in positions of privilege or power (Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2013). By acknowledging victims' epistemic standpoints, we validate their experiences and create space for more accurate and just assessments of wrongdoing and responsibility.

Furthermore, standpoint epistemology highlights how victims' perspectives can reveal the structural and systemic dimensions of harm that are otherwise obscured. This is crucial for addressing not only individual acts of wrongdoing but also the broader social conditions that enable such harms (Harding, 1991; Collins, 2000). Recognizing and respecting the epistemic standpoints of

[12] I talk more about this with connection to Artificial Intelligence in Stedtler & Leventi (2025).

victims thus contributes to more effective responses, including fairer mechanisms of accountability, redress, and social change. In this way, standpoint epistemology empowers victims by acknowledging their agency and authority as knowers, rather than treating them solely as passive recipients of harm.

Victim blaming

I present the phenomenon of victim blaming in "Victim Blaming, Justified Risks, and Imperfect Victims." I understand victim blaming as the attribution of blame to victims in a way that ignores the presence of a wrongdoer and the impact of structural injustice. In cases of victim blaming, the burden for the harm inflicted is placed upon the victims instead of the perpetrators. Further, the origin of the harm is traced back to the victim, despite the wrongdoer by definition being at the heart of the cause. For example, questioning the choices, behavior, or appearance of victims constitutes victim blaming. For the purposes of this thesis, I focus specifically on cases where victims had access to information that could have protected them but in which they chose to ignore it.

Building on this understanding, I examine victim blaming through the concepts of "justified risks" and "imperfect victims." I argue that victim blaming often involves epistemic injustice, where victims' knowledge and experiences are dismissed or questioned, thereby compounding their harm. Victims are not always perfectly informed or cautious, and holding them fully responsible for harm overlooks the complexities and limitations they face. By exploring justified risks, I show that victims may reasonably take certain risks without warranting blame. While acknowledging that victims can be imperfect, sometimes even perpetrator themselves, I emphasize that such imperfections should not lead to disproportionate blame. This nuanced approach aims to clarify when blame is morally appropriate and when it unjustly targets victims, especially within contexts shaped by structural injustice.

Complementing this view, Paulina Sliwa (2024) highlights the social dynamics of victim blaming, describing it not only as a moral failing but also as a social mechanism that redirects scrutiny away from dominant groups and onto victims. This process obscures the role of institutional and cultural factors in causing harm, thereby reinforcing existing power structures and perpetuating injustice. What mine and Sliwa's accounts have in common is that we are trying to illuminate the moral and social dimensions of victim blaming, underscoring the critical need to distinguish legitimate moral critique from harmful victim blaming.

Moral Repair

Following Margaret Urban Walker's account of moral repair, I draw both a distinction and a parallel between moral repair and forgiveness which I make use in "Understanding the Process of Forgiving." Walker argues that forgiveness is not merely a personal emotional response, but a relational act aimed at restoring the shared moral expectations between individuals. As she puts it, "forgiveness should restore, or return to a functioning state, the conditions of the moral relationship" (Walker 2006, 162). In this view, forgiveness functions as a morally reparative process when it affirms shared values and standards, stabilizes trust in moral responsiveness, and restores or instills a hopeful view of ourselves and others as moral agents.

While I draw on Walker's framework, particularly in its prioritization of the victim's moral standing, I do not treat forgiveness and moral repair as fully interchangeable as Walker does. I argue that forgiveness is one pathway to achieving moral repair, but not the only or always appropriate one. Other forms of moral acknowledgment, such as apology, restitution, or third-party compensation, may also contribute to repairing moral relationships without necessarily requiring forgiveness.

This distinction is reinforced by feminist philosophers such as Alice MacLachlan, who cautions against reducing forgiveness to a moral obligation or standard response. She emphasizes the relational complexity of post-harm contexts, especially when victims may not feel safe, empowered, or emotionally ready to forgive (MacLachlan 2009, 2015). Similarly, Trudy Govier notes that forgiveness, while potentially healing, must never be coerced or expected as a condition for moral closure; true repair must begin with recognition and respect for the victim's autonomy and perspective (Govier 2002). In line with these thinkers, I maintain that forgiveness should remain a meaningful option within a broader moral repertoire, not a normative requirement of repair.

Summaries of the Papers

This section offers an overview of the papers that are included in this thesis.

"The victim's perspective: How thinking about the victim can provide answers to philosophical issues of responsibility"

This paper starts by briefly engaging one of the central discussions on the moral responsibility debate, namely the epistemic condition for moral responsibility. The plausible general question is how one can be to blame for an action if one could not know that it would be harmful. The aim of the paper is to underline that we need to blame people not only on the basis of their normative capacities but also to reinstate the normative standing of the victim. Further, it suggests that at least a few of the main worries about moral responsibility could be addressed if we had a more comprehensive understanding of the circumstances involving the harmful event, and that can happen by adding the perspective of the victims into the discussion.

Finally, it is underlined that the concept of the victim is underinvestigated. It seems that we do not fully grasp who the victim is. In this paper, I consider the victims as the people who are systematically victimized and are more exposed to possible harm than others. Although this way of conceptualizing victimhood does limit the scope of the investigation, it serves the purpose of excluding the one-time of victims, who are less impacted by harm if they are at all.

"Victim Blaming, Justified Risks, and Imperfect Victims"

This paper starts with a brief introduction of the phenomenon of victim blaming centered around the example is a woman walking through a park alone. To understand the basis of the philosophical debate the distinction between epistemic and moral blame is drawn. The suggestion to distinguish moral responsibility and blameworthiness is examined. A lot of weight is given to the argument that this distinction can help explain away the idea of our contradictory and sometimes problematic intuitions. This paper focuses on those cases of victimization in which it is alleged that the victims could have avoided being harmed if only they had taken steps widely known to be advisable. The idea of justified risk-taking is investigated, in the light of the example of a woman walking down a street that is known to be dangerous. The woman has as her aim to reclaim the space she is losing because of the state of structural injustice which limits the space she can safely occupy. Thus, although she might appear blameworthy for her own victimization when she takes a risk, we, as a moral community, should not blame her for her risk-taking

behavior but actually praise her for trying to reclaim the space for the benefit of other women. The distinction between social and moral norms is being used again. Although people who were seen as norm breakers in their time, like Rosa Parks, we now view them as praiseworthy because the communities they were part of were not just.

“Rethinking Moral Protest: Supporting Vulnerable Groups Beyond Blame”

Moral protest is a crucial but underexplored moral response that offers an alternative to moral blame in addressing wrongdoing. Originally introduced by Pamela Hieronymi (2001) as a form of moral blame targeting harmful acts rather than agents, protest encourages a less extreme reaction to moral wrongdoings. This article argues that philosophical discussions have focused too narrowly on revising blame, overlooking the potential of moral protest as a distinct and valuable response. Although Hieronymi’s concept has shaped the debate, it falls short in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups and victims of systemic injustice. This paper proposes a revised understanding of protest seen as separate from blame, empowering victims to challenge harmful behavior without the need for direct confrontation with wrongdoers. This approach helps victims navigate complex social relations with unavoidable and systematic perpetrators such as family members or coworkers. While also considering how protest may apply when perpetrators’ moral capacities are compromised, the paper’s central aim is to promote victims’ well-being and equip marginalized groups with practical strategies for managing difficult moral interactions, when blame does not seem like a viable option.

“Understanding the Process of Forgiving”

The concept of forgiveness is an integral part of our moral and social lives. It is a fact that we need and use forgiveness to coexist in societies and interact with others. Within groups of people, miscommunications, and events of harm can be an everyday phenomenon, and forgiveness helps people overcome such challenges and maintain social interactions in a peaceful manner.

I argue that the standard understanding of forgiveness seems inadequate for capturing the nuance of how people act when they forgive. More importantly, standard understandings tend to omit the process that is needed to reach a state of meaningful forgiveness, in contrast to superficial and thoughtless expressions of forgiveness. This process has not been adequately investigated in the forgiveness literature, and this lacuna explains some common misconceptions regarding forgiveness.

My aim here is to present a new perspective, which makes a distinction between the process of negotiating forgiveness and the end state of forgiveness. The two parties, the wrongdoer and the victim negotiate how they can overcome the harm that was inflicted. The involved parties try to rearrange the terms of the relationship in a way that creates ground for them to reach a level of understanding that can lead their relationship to a similar, but not necessarily identical, state as that before the hurtful event.

Underappreciated but very common forgiveness situations take place within ongoing personal relationships. This article aims to describe how forgiveness happens gradually when it takes place between people who are already in some sort of relationship while the harm takes place. My main focus for this article is to analyze how the terms of a relationship can be renegotiated in order for the victim to overcome the hurt of the harmful event and what kind of changes in the relationship the wrongdoer can make to help the victim overcome the negative emotions.

How it all relates

The papers in this thesis are unified in two keyways. First, all four address central issues in the philosophy of moral responsibility, specifically, issues concerning blame (broadly construed), moral protest, and forgiveness. These phenomena are important in a wider philosophical inquiry into the nature and practice of moral responsibility. Second, and more distinctively, all four papers are connected by a shared methodological commitment: each centers the perspective of the victim. Naturally, I will not explain the victim perspective in each paper of this thesis. Instead, the victim's perspective is used as a lens, through which I will examine different responsibility issues. Finally, all four papers can be seen as ordered in a paradigmatic scheme of the sequence of events after moral harm takes place.

As noted in an earlier section, Margaret Urban Walker (2008) introduces the idea of "transparency testing," a methodological tool that invites us to examine philosophical theories from alternative standpoints, particularly those shaped by vulnerability or harm. My use of transparency testing extends beyond empirical or data-driven analysis; instead, it calls for a shift in philosophical perspective from the perspective of the perpetrator to the perspective of the victim. Throughout this thesis, I apply transparency testing by examining prevailing theories of moral responsibility from the standpoint of those who

have been harmed and are more likely to be systematically harmed in the future.

The first paper lays the theoretical groundwork for adopting the victim's perspective. It introduces and justifies this standpoint as legitimate and necessary for assessing moral concepts. Its dual aim is to establish both the background and the rationale for using the victim's viewpoint to engage with established debates in moral philosophy. This paper is the backbone of the thesis, offering an essential presentation of what are the advantages and disadvantages of suing the perspective of the victim.

The second paper focuses on a pervasive and harmful social phenomenon, namely victim blaming. It approaches this problem by drawing on a philosophical distinction between moral responsibility and blameworthiness, to make sense of our moral intuitions and reveal the underlying mechanisms of such blaming practices. This paper exemplifies how philosophical analysis can illuminate and challenge troubling aspects of everyday moral life. Here, the victim's perspective serves not just as a normative anchor but as a methodological insight, showing how moral philosophy can be responsive to lived experience.

The third paper examines moral protest as an alternative to conventional forms of blame. Building on Hieronymi's account on moral protest, the paper revisits moral protest by critically viewing the existing account. My aim was to reconceptualize moral protest in the light of the experiences of members of vulnerable groups. By shifting the focus from abstract moral agents to those who experience harm, the paper challenges standard assumptions about the nature and targets of moral blame.

The final paper engages with the concept of forgiveness, particularly in contexts where reconciliation may not be possible or desirable. It explores how forgiveness can support victims in letting go of negative emotions without placing the burden of relational repair entirely on them. This account resists overly idealized views of forgiveness that often neglect the victim's moral autonomy and emotional reality.

As a unified idea, these four papers follow how a paradigmatic case of the sequence of events that can take place after moral harm. This sequence starts with the idea that we can view moral harm from a different perspective than the one that we have viewed as default. This narrative can be seen opening for a moral discussion between the victim and the perpetrator. It is important to underline that this moral discussion is different from any other one in the sense that it is conducted with the victim's well-being as a priority.

Accepting that there are other perspectives and experiences give us reasons to find people responsible for moral faults that we might not have considered before. Often excuses in combination with power imbalances and structural injustice can overshadow the victim's presence in the event of the moral harm. As I mentioned previously, framing the circumstances of the harm from the perspective of the perpetrator may more or less remove the victim from the moral consideration or the possibility of redress. The victim's perspective introduces the possibility of blaming for the sake of the victim. The first paper of this thesis makes space for this possibility

If moral harm remains unaddressed, then the blame for it must be pointed at someone.[13] When society and perpetrators are not shouldering any of the burden, the victims remains as the only possible recipient of blame. The victims remain as the only members of this harmful interaction that can change their behavior, given that they do not want to be victimized again. When such situations arise, we might observe the phenomenon of victim blaming. Even benevolent viers of the situation will ask victims what they are themselves (the victims) do not do anything to protect themselves if society is not protecting them and the perpetrators will not stop harming them (the victims). The second paper addresses this worry, namely that if we do place the weight of acknowledgement and compensation on the perpetrators, then the victims will get revictimized.

Although this narrative suggests that perpetrators can be blamed due to the victim's perspective when other accounts suggest that the same perpetrators are not blameworthy, a question arises on whether blame is the only moral reaction that the victims can adopt towards perpetrator. My suggestion is that blame can be an essential moral response, but that there are other moral responses. Although there are potentially many moral responses that a victim can adopt depending on their circumstances, my suggestion here is moral protest. My interpretation of moral protest suggests a type of moral disengagement, which the victims can chose to adopt when dealing with persons who express objectionable views (for example of sexism and racism) and who might act accordingly. In many cases, the victim already knows and have a relationship to such a person, and for various reasons, the victim cannot remove him or herself from that relationship. Examples include family

[13] There might be the option that after moral harm takes place the victims can continue their lives without blame. Thus, although something wrong happened there is no need to do anything about it. I believe that this could be a possibility in an idealized world, or when the victim does not belong in a vulnerable group. Therefore, I suggest that the blame needs to point at someone.

members, friends and coworkers, who can often be both disrespectful and unavoidable.

After a harmful expression or act, the ideal ending would be that perpetrator and the victim try to overcome the situation, and ideally that they try to reinstate their relationship. There are many ways that one can try to salvage a relationship. The idea that I consider is the one where both perpetrator and victim are trying to move away from the incident of harm and find a space of shared respect and understanding. My contention is that the act of harm that initiated this moral sequence of events will leave a mark on both parties, perpetrator and victim. Thus, it is necessary that the harm and its implication are addressed and that both parties agree on what might be done in order for the relationship to be rectified.

I propose that this schematic of moral sequences from blame, to blaming the right person, to adopting a moral response to reaching forgiveness, can be seen as a moral dialogue, where there is acknowledgment and negotiation of how to handle the moral harm and its implication. This type of analogy can help us understand the wide range of choices and moral responses available from the perspective of the victim and the perpetrator and the implications that those choices can have.

In light of this understanding of the moral dialogue, the conviction that philosophical discussions of moral responsibility must remain connected to social experience seems unavoidable. My understanding of moral philosophy is that it is a field that can offer a way to navigate life. Moral issues can be discussed within everyday life situations and dilemmas, and it can at the same time being the leading discussion of a philosophical panel in university. That makes moral philosophy unique and often confusing. People with no official moral education are burdened with the choices that overly educated individuals dedicate their lives to solve. We mostly view this situation natural, people have to make moral decisions every day, and they are forced to think about these.

This interaction can be seen as a circular connection between the academic and the folk lime of thinking. On the one hand, sometimes the moral state of society influences academics. As I have mentioned before, my understanding is that people, even academics, cannot completely separate their personal views, upbringing and environment from their own academic moral views. Thus, discussions of moral philosophy would often be an indication of the contemporary moral reality.

On the other hand, academics can often influence or provide moral guidance for society. The views of academics might be propagated throughout society

by students, not least those who end up working with policy. Moreover, academics are often invited to talk or to formulate their opinions about moral dilemmas that society faces. Of course, this assumption accepts that there are moral philosophers inside and outside academia who make their theories accessible to a broader public and that at least some part of the public is interested in the issues that the philosophers write about. This interaction between academics and the public is ongoing, and they are constantly feeding each other.

Given this situation, sometimes, moral philosophy can help make sense of everyday moral life; at other times, moral philosophy might have to be reshaped considering the perspectives and realities of those that it too often excludes. Across all four contributions in this thesis, I argue that much of the moral responsibility literature has been shaped by an idealized view of human interaction, one that risks marginalizing those who do not fit its assumptions. While ideal theory can be a useful philosophical tool, it must be critically examined and challenged from alternative viewpoints, so that it does not obscure or exclude the moral significance of real, lived experiences. If the goal is equitable inclusion of as many as possible as equal moral subjects, society and its moral views can be seen both to progress and sometimes to digress, and it is important that moral philosophy remains attuned and able to address these different developments and their implications for different individuals and groups.

Outlook and Future Research

This thesis offers a distinct and in many ways novel approach to examining moral responsibility by centering on how moral practices affect individuals who lack the social position or visibility to be heard fully. A key theme is how appreciating the perspectives of members of vulnerable groups can reshape our understanding of morality. This opens several avenues for future research, avenues that cannot be explored in this project, which seeks to contribute to laying the grounds for the victim's perspective to begin with. This especially concerns topics such as victimhood, victim blaming, moral disengagement, and forgiveness.

Rethinking Victimhood

One of the guiding questions introduced early in this thesis remains relevant throughout: Who is a victim? What types of harm can produce victims, and can a person be a victim even if they themselves reject that label? For instance, victims of natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina are widely recognized as victims. But what about so-called "victimless crimes"? This ambiguity invites further exploration.

The thesis primarily focuses on people who are systematically harmed, referred to interchangeably as members of vulnerable groups. However, this categorization deserves scrutiny. How many instances of harm constitute systemic victimization? And what if someone who experiences repeated harm does not perceive it as damaging or simply tolerates it? These questions highlight the complexity of defining victimhood and call for empirical and philosophical investigation.

Moreover, the issue becomes even more intricate when considering individuals who are both victims and perpetrators. As raised through Watson's (2004a) example of Robert Harris, our moral intuitions falter when a perpetrator also appears to be a victim. This overlaps with ongoing debates around epistemic limitations and moral blame. For instance, Levy (2003) argues that individuals raised in racist environments cannot be fully blamed for holding racist views, suggesting that some perpetrators may be victims of epistemic injustice.

In addition, as it was mentioned in the previous section there is a critical question: should individuals like incels be included within a victim-centered account of responsibility? I did not incels as victims in virtue of them losing a privilege and not a right when women do not sleep with them. But further research is needed in order to create a more solid ground for the distinction between people such as incels and the victims of systematic injustice I have been examining in this thesis. These examples indicate that the category of "victim" is far more nuanced than often assumed, and its relevance extends to broader philosophical debates, including moral responsibility and blameworthiness. There is need for further research in light of the distinct circumstances of experiencing harm.

In addition, an important question is who can be seen as a victim. For example, in Down Girl (2018), Kate Manne examines the phenomenon of involuntary celibate, or incels, through the lens of the logic of misogyny. Manne argues that incels view women as owing them sex, or moral support, and when these expectations are unmet, and from their perspectives they are the victims of societal status and circumstances.

Moreover, another aspect of being a victim is the relationship between interpersonal and structural interactions. The concept of victimhood operates at both interpersonal and structural levels, and understanding the connection between these dimensions is essential for a comprehensive account of moral responsibility and harm. While many examples of victimhood center on interactions between two individuals, such as blame, forgiveness, or moral protest, these dyadic encounters often reflect and are shaped by broader social structures and systemic inequalities (Young, 2011; Walker, 2006).

Interpersonal instances of harm are not isolated events but occur within a framework of social, cultural, and institutional forces that produce and sustain vulnerability (Fricker, 2007). For example, when one person victimizes another, their interaction may be influenced by power imbalances rooted in gender, race, class, or other social categories (Crenshaw, 1991; Young, 2011). These structural factors shape who is more likely to be victimized, the forms harm takes, and how victims are perceived and treated.

By examining victimhood through specific interpersonal cases, we gain insight into how structural injustices manifest in everyday relationships (Walker, 2006; Fricker, 2007). These examples serve as microcosms that reveal patterns of systemic victimization, making abstract social forces tangible and morally salient. Therefore, the moral lessons drawn from individual cases, such as the challenges of forgiveness or the legitimacy of blame, can be extended to understand the experiences of wider vulnerable groups. In this way, they theoretically generalize to other situations.

This approach justifies the use of interpersonal examples in the thesis: they provide a concrete, relatable starting point while simultaneously opening pathways to explore the pervasive and embedded nature of structural victimhood. Thus, the interpersonal and structural are interconnected layers, with the former often exemplifying the lived realities produced by the latter (Young, 2011; Walker, 2006). There is a need for more realistic examples of moral harm that can investigate how people can navigate such circumstances.

Importantly, this interpersonal-structural connection is not only relevant to social and political ethics but also extends to environmental ethics, where individual harms, such as pollution or resource depletion, often reflect and perpetuate broader systemic injustices. For instance, marginalized communities disproportionately suffer the effects of environmental degradation, linking interpersonal victimization to structural environmental injustice (Schlosberg, 2007). Gunnemyr and Touborg (2021) further emphasize that environmental harm is often experienced through interpersonal

relationships that reveal larger patterns of ecological injustice, highlighting the ethical importance of recognizing victims both as individuals and as members of vulnerable communities. A similar dynamic is evident in the context of unfair trade practices, where individual exploitation, such as underpaid labor or unsafe working conditions, reflects deeper global inequalities embedded in trade systems. Workers in low-income countries often face these harms not merely as isolated individuals but as part of historically disadvantaged communities, making the interpersonal experience of economic injustice inseparable from structural patterns of global inequality (Young, 2006; Barry & Reddy, 2008). Thus, it is important to understand and examine in greater depth the interaction between the interpersonal and structural.

Moral Responsibility and Social Context

Another key insight of the thesis is that moral and social practices are deeply intertwined. Philosophers like Ciurria (2023) and Hänel (2024) have applied non-ideal theory to moral philosophy, questioning traditional Strawsonian frameworks and developing feminist critiques. Similarly, this thesis approaches victim blaming and responsibility as non-ideal theory, challenging the idea that moral principles can be formulated in abstraction from social realities.

For example, consider how women are expected to navigate dangerous public spaces as discussed in "Victim Blaming, Justified Risks and Imperfect Victims." Society often accepts this danger as inevitable, placing the burden of risk management on the potential victims rather than addressing the underlying structures of harm. Philosophical accounts of blame rarely consider how blame actually functions in everyday social interactions, often treating it as a sanitized, idealized concept.

Yet excluding social practices from philosophical inquiry risks producing theories that are detached from lived experience. While these theories might be still related to some social practices, these described practices can be misleading or morally corrupt, philosophers themselves are not neutral observers, they, too, are shaped by social contexts. Thus, future work should explore how situated knowledge and lived experience inform moral judgment.

In relation to this, questions for future inquiry include: Who is seen as blameworthy when taking risks? Are privileged individuals judged less harshly for moral failings? These questions take inspiration from Williams's (1985) discussion of the French nineteenth-century painter Gaugin who abandoned his family. Williams states that only the members of Gauguin's family had the standing to blame him for abandoning them and that outside observers are not

fit to judge . In this way, Williams implicitly treats personal relationships as outside the realm of public morality. Okin (1989) presented similar criticisms of Rawls, arguing that the private sphere must not be excluded from moral evaluation, and that the structure of the family should be evaluated in virtue of fairness in the same way as the state. However, the discussions in this thesis of how individual harm is always structurally situated will suggest that the relationships and interactions between different perspectives of public and private responsibility will merit further analysis

Moreover, the thesis points to the fruitfulness of engaging with the distinction between victim blaming and victim advising. Victim blaming and victim advising are two distinct responses to someone who has experienced harm, but they can often appear similar on the surface. Victim blaming occurs when responsibility for the harm is shifted onto the victim, suggesting that their actions caused or justified the wrongdoing. In contrast, victim advising typically aims to offer guidance or support to help the person stay safer in the future. However, when advice is poorly timed, unsolicited, or framed insensitively, it can come across as blame, making the victim feel at fault. The key difference lies in intent and delivery, victim blaming seeks to hold the victim accountable, while victim advising, when done thoughtfully, centers the victim's well-being and autonomy. According to Sliwa (2024), it is not enough for an utterance to count as victim blaming that someone makes salient the victim's conduct and agency in bringing about her harm. In addition, this utterance needs to be morally problematic in some way, for example by violating an obligation that the speaker has towards the victim. I believe that Sliwa is on the right track and that we need to talk more about what is this morally problematic aspect that transforms advising into blaming.[14]

Forgiveness, Privilege, and Moral Protest

A further area for future research concerns the nature and function of forgiveness. The thesis argues that forgiveness should be understood instrumentally valuable, yet there is considerable debate over whether it also holds intrinsic value. Distinguishing between forgiving (the act) and

[14] A similar conversation can be had about how to ask information from the victims about their victimization. People tend to want to know details about the circumstances that led to the harm. Although, questions such as "Which train did you take," or "Did you talk to him?" often appear innocent and epistemically driven, they can be experienced and delivered as blaming the victim.

forgiveness (the process or state) could clarify misunderstandings in the literature.

Different forms of forgiveness should also be examined. If forgiveness can be seen from different perspectives, for example as something that can be gifted or as something that can be one sided, it can be the case that other types exist in everyday life. The idea of "letting go," for example, could be understood as a more accessible form of forgiveness for members of vulnerable groups, especially when the burden of blame or the need to "move on" outweighs the potential for moral resolution. This distinction, between forgiving and letting go, can be useful, if we accept that forgiveness can often be a burden for the victims.

Another perspective that needs to be further investigated is whether there are actions that are objectively unforgivable. Should there be certain actions such as genocide, torture, rape, or profound betrayals that are so morally grave that they place the offender beyond forgiveness, at least under ordinary moral standards? However, forgiveness can be seen as inherently personal and subjective and therefore unregulated by objective rules. What is unforgivable for one person may not be for another. Even so, within communities, shared norms can create a sense that certain actions cannot be forgiven (Walker, 2006). Although some of these acts can be rare, they might be considered so abominable that they justifiably be treated as morally beyond pardon both within and across particular social or ethical contexts. At least it might remain understandable and difficult to contest if many victims refused to forgive the perpetrators of the acts. The distinction between the victim's and the perpetrator's perspectives might enrich these inquiries.

The role of associated concepts like apologies, recognition, and accountability must also be better understood. How are these concepts linked to forgiveness? What makes an apology meaningful or empty? These questions are essential to mapping how forgiveness operates in real social and moral contexts.

Furthermore, future research should examine the implicit expectation that members of vulnerable groups must educate others about their oppression. As noted by Eddo-Lodge (2017), this burden is often unfairly placed on those already marginalized. While some theorists, such as Hieronymi (2020), suggest that those who desire social change must be willing to bear this burden, it is important to recognize how unjust this expectation can be. Vulnerable individuals may feel that failing to speak out is a betrayal not just of themselves, but of their broader community, a moral tension worth investigating empirically.

Lastly, the idea that adopting "less extreme" moral responses, for example moral protest or moral criticism, presupposes privilege must be examined further. For someone with economic security, having a wallet stolen may be a minor inconvenience. But for someone relying on that money to feed their family, the same event is devastating. The capacity to forgive or to respond moderately is often a luxury, one not available to everyone. So reactions such as moral criticism or normative hope that have already been developed by other researchers, for example Zheng (2021), could be expanded more.

Implications for Feminism and Intersectionality

The discussions throughout this thesis have implications for feminism and intersectionality. Feminism and intersectionality are closely related but conceptually distinct frameworks. I understand the term 'feminism' with an intersectional understanding. That is, feminism here does not concern itself solely with the rights and experiences of women, but with social groups, in general, that are systematically marginalized or oppressed.

The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. It refers to the idea that various intersecting forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism, do not simply accumulate but intersect in complex ways, producing unique experiences of marginalization. Crenshaw explicitly rejected the notion that categories such as gender, race, and class operate independently of one another. As she explains, "the violence that many women experiences is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class" (1991, p. 1242).

Intersectional feminism, therefore, seeks to understand how overlapping systems of oppression shape individuals' lived experiences. It recognizes that injustices cannot be neatly compartmentalized; for instance, while all women may face wage inequality, women of color often experience this disparity more severely due to the compounding effects of racism and sexism (Amadeo, 2023).

In this thesis I have not employed these frameworks. However, a victim-based account of responsibility can be enriched by an intersectional framework, and vice versa, because individuals' capacities for agency and the burdens placed upon them are deeply affected by their social positioning. Without intersectionality, such accounts risk flattening the differences in how responsibility is assigned or assumed across diverse groups. For example, a woman of color navigating poverty and systemic discrimination may face structural constraints that a more privileged woman does not, even if both are victims of the same category of harm. Intersectionality ensures that moral and

social assessments of responsibility take into account not only the harm suffered but also the contextual barriers to autonomy and empowerment. This is essential for avoiding the inadvertent re-victimization of those already marginalized by treating them as if they operate within the same social conditions as more privileged individuals and thus leading them to believe that they have only themselves to blame for their suffering, and their failure to obtain redress.

While the examples in this thesis primarily engage with gender-based scenarios and do not explicitly develop an intersectional analysis involving race, class, disability, or other axes of identity, I intend them to function as conceptual placeholders rather than exhaustive representations. I believe that they can offer a starting point for further discussions that would include a wider spectrum of intersectional aspects. These discussions are pressing topics for future research.

Wrongfulness or Culpability vs. Wrongness or Impermissibility

An important distinction to keep in mind when discussing moral responsibility and blame concerns the difference between wrongfulness, often associated with culpability, and wrongness, often linked to impermissibility or moral prohibition. Wrongfulness can be interpreted as involving an agent's fault, that is, the agent's blameworthiness due to having acted intentionally, negligently, or with some other morally relevant deficit (Kramer, 2005). In contrast, wrongness can be viewed as examining whether an action is impermissible or morally prohibited, independent of whether the agent is at fault (Lillehammer, 2014).

This distinction can help us clarify why not being at fault does not necessarily exempt someone from certain duties of compensation or obligations to address and acknowledge harm. Even when an agent is excused from blame because they lack culpability, perhaps due to ignorance, coercion, upbringing or impaired normative competence, they may still have a responsibility or a duty to respond to the wrongness of their action or even to not omit certain measures in order to avoid such actions in the future insofar as it caused harm or violated moral norms.

Put differently, remedial duties are grounded in the wrongness of the action, not merely the wrongfulness of the agent's conduct. An agent who commits a morally impermissible act but lacks culpability may be free from blame or punishment, but this does not automatically free them from obligations such as acknowledgment, apology, or reparations. Such duties recognize the moral

significance of the victim's experience and aim to restore the moral relationship, irrespective of the perpetrator's blameworthiness.

Kramer (2005) highlights this by distinguishing moral indignation, which presupposes culpability, from other moral responses that can be appropriate even in the absence of fault. Lillehammer (2014) further explores cases where ignorance or diminished capacity remove blame but do not erase the impermissibility of an action, thus maintaining the agent's responsibility to make amends or otherwise address the consequences.

Understanding this separation is crucial for a victim-centered approach to blame and responsibility. It reinforces the idea that moral demands placed by victims, such as the demand for recognition or repair, can be valid even when the wrongdoer is excused from blame. This perspective avoids the pitfall of excusing wrongdoers in a way that simultaneously silences or marginalizes victims, thereby promoting a more inclusive and just moral framework. As with having a wider range of moral responses at our disposal, these types of distinctions can help make sense of the complexities of moral interactions.

Standing to Blame

Another important issue in moral responsibility concerns whether someone has the moral authority or legitimacy to engage in a moral practice, who can blame or take offense. In the case of blame, someone's standing depends not only on whether the other person has done something wrong, but also on who the blamer is, and what their relationship is to the wrongdoing or the broader moral context (Smith, 2007).

McTernan (2023) and many others have argued that moral blame and offense are not universally legitimate responses. Instead, standing is socially and morally conditioned. For example, those who benefit from injustice or lack moral credibility may not have the right to blame victims or marginalized individuals. His insights encourage epistemic humility in blame practices, recognizing that not everyone is equally positioned to judge or to take offense. This is a recognition that aligns with earlier work by Watson (2004) and Scanlon (2008), highlighting that blame is deeply embedded in social relationships and histories. Moreover, when blame is expressed from a compromised position, namely by someone complicit in injustice or lacking moral credibility, it can reinforce power imbalances. Rather than promoting justice, such blame can further silence victims, as it can be used to deflect criticism and to perpetuate unequal interactions.

The question of standing is particularly crucial for victim-based accounts of moral responsibility, which center on the perspectives of those harmed. Victims often have a unique and legitimate claim to hold wrongdoers accountable and express moral offense. Recognizing who can legitimately take offense or blame helps prevent misuse of blame by privileged or perpetrating parties who may silence or delegitimize victims' responses. Edlich (2022) investigates the relationship between a third party's standing to blame while considering the victim's well-being.[15] Thus, incorporating the notion of standing ensures that moral responsibility remains sensitive to power dynamics and social context, affirming victims as central moral agents rather than sidelined objects of judgment. McTernan's insights encourage epistemic humility in blame practices, recognizing that not everyone is equally positioned to judge or take offense. It is important for future research to examine how different social positions can influence one's standing to blame others.

Conclusion

In sum, this thesis identifies and opens several rich and underexplored areas for philosophical research. By challenging idealized notions of moral responsibility and instead focusing on real-world moral practices, especially as experienced by vulnerable populations, it suggests that future work can produce more grounded, inclusive, socially responsive and responsible moral theories. This is important, especially if we want to make moral philosophy representative of and applicable to a wide range of experiences and interactions.

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[15] However, given the rise of social media it is still difficult to define who has standing to blame and who does not.

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The Victim's Perspective

This thesis offers a methodological shift in moral responsibility by placing the victim's perspective at its center. Challenging standard philosophical narratives, this thesis explores how moral harm unfolds from the perspective of those most affected, by examining how blame and forgiveness can form a moral dialogue between victim and perpetrator. Through a series of interconnected papers, this work identifies critical gaps in current debates and offers a victim-based framework that broadens our understanding of moral responsibility, aiming for an inclusive account.

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