Taking responsibility for wrongs done by others

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In affiliating with others, we give up some autonomy, in the sense of independence from other agents. But we do not necessarily thereby give up… moral integrity.

Claudia Card, *The Unnatural Lottery*, p. 30

[L]iving in moral relationship requires a residual and renewable *hopefulness* that we and others are worthy of the trust we place in each other, and that our world allows us to pursue the goods to which our shared understandings are meant to lead us.

Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Repair*, p. 24

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explain and vindicate the social phenomenon which I call "taking responsibility for wrongs done by others" – a certain cluster of responses associated with responsibility that we (sometimes) implement in response to the wrongs done by our near and dear. Such responses differ noticeably from the responses of uninvolved witnesses. Even when those wrongs cannot be traced to our own faulty actions or omissions, we tend to experience guilt-like attitudes, offer apologies, seek forgiveness, and make amends. I argue that the responses of relatives can be understood as instances of a wider practice of taking responsibility; more specifically as instances of its non-paradigmatic form – taking responsibility for actions of others. First, I provide a functionalist account of taking responsibility for our own actions. I argue that the practice of taking responsibility for wrongdoing serves an important function of repairing moral relationships between the wrongdoer and the wronged party. Next, I argue that the practice of taking responsibility for wrongs done by their relatives also serves a reparative function, as evidenced in the paradigm case. More specifically, it serves the function of repairing moral relationships between the *innocent* relatives of the wrongdoer and the victims.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explain and vindicate the social phenomenon which I call "taking responsibility for wrongs done by others" – a certain cluster of responses associated with responsibility that we (sometimes) implement in response to the wrongs done by our near and dear, even when those wrongs cannot be traced to our own culpable actions or omissions. Such responses differ noticeably from the responses of uninvolved witnesses: we tend to experience self-punitive emotions (guilt, shame, remorse, regret), offer apologies, seek forgiveness, and make amends.

As an illustration of this phenomenon, consider the following two examples:[1]

> Sue Klebold is the mother of one of two students responsible for the shooting of thirteen people during the massacre at Columbine High School. In her memoir, she writes that after the massacre "[a] day does not pass that I do not feel a sense of overwhelming guilt…for the destruction [her son] left in his wake." (Klebold 2017, 338). Moreover, Sue says that one of the reasons she decided to write the memoir in the aftermath of the shooting had to do with her felt need to apologize to the families of the victims (Klebold 2017, 282).

> Rainer Höss is the grandson of Rudolf Höss, who was responsible for the extermination of 2.5 million people as a commandant of the Auschwitz death camp. Rainer was born 18 years after his grandfather's execution and had no involvement or contribution to the mass killings. Despite this, he reports that he carries the guilt in his mind and feels ashamed of what his family did. Rainer's guilt arises from his relation to his grandfather and not from any wrongdoing on his part. He engages in conversations with the families of the victims of the atrocities caused by his grandfather, offering apologies, which are perceived as significant acts of reparation (Ze'evi, 2011).

These cases have many complicated features. However, one thing that I will stipulate is that the agents are not indirectly responsible for the wrongdoing: either by culpably contributing to it, or

[1] The examples of Sue and Rainer are also extensively discussed by Telech (2022, 243-249). Telech dicusses them in the context of moral luck and proposes that both Sue and Rainer experience a distinct kind of moral emotion *relational-regret*. The case of Sue is also extensively discussed in Sepinwal (2017, 47-52) in a context of criminal liability. Both accounts of Telech and Sepinwal are, I believe, congenial to my project here. However, they do not discuss the responses of the relatives in terms of a distinct social practice.

culpably failing to prevent it. Sue Klebold did not participate in, nor knew about, Dylan's murder. Rainer was born long after the Holocaust and so he clearly had no involvement in Nazi atrocities. We can therefore assume, for the sake of this thesis, that neither Sue nor Rainer is at *fault* for either contributing to or not preventing the wrong from occurring (I motivate this assumption further in the next section). If we assume that fault is necessary for being blameworthy, then neither Sue nor Rainer is morally responsible, in the sense of being blameworthy, for what their relatives did.

What are we to make of these cases? One might doubt the genuineness of the desire of protagonists to apologize or show remorse. Perhaps Sue and Rainer do not feel sincerely sorry, but they apologize in order to pre-empt any distrust that they share in their relatives' animosity. However, even if those, and many other, instances of apologies and expressions of remorse for wrongs done by others are motivated by selfish worries about reputation, they are still worth investigating. For they suggest that agents, though blameless, can be expected to do something in response to the wrongs done by their relatives – to *take responsibility* by undertaking the affective burden of guilt, offering apologies, making amends - in virtue of their connection to the wrongdoing.

In this thesis I will argue that Sue's and Rainer's responses can be understood as instances of the wider practice of taking responsibility; more specifically as instances of its non-paradigmatic form – taking responsibility for actions of others. I will argue that the practice of taking responsibility for wrongs done by others serves the same reparative function as the practice of taking responsibility for our own misdeeds. There are two central challenges that I must address to defend my claim.

First, there is *the explicatory challenge*. How can we talk about 'taking responsibility' for actions of others? What exactly are the conditions under which a person can take responsibility for what another person has done? Is the concept of taking responsibility the most appropriate one to make sense of those?

Second, there is *the vindicatory challenge*: how do we vindicate the practice in which a person A takes responsibility for the misconduct of another person B, when A would have been considered faultless or not responsible for the misdeeds if we only considered their own conduct? *Pima facie*, such practice does not appear to be fully acceptable.

1.1. The cases of Sue and Rainer

Let me begin by examining the cases of Sue and Rainer and clarifying the sense in which they take responsibility for the actions of their relatives. This is an important step that can help us to bring into a clearer view both what it means to take responsibility for the misdeeds of our close ones and what would constitute a failure to do so. Moreover, it is an important step to explain how taking responsibility for wrongs done by others is different from the sort of response that is expected from the wrongdoer and the responses which may be expected from other members of the community which are not linked to the wrongdoing in the same way Sue and Rainer are.

1.1.1. Sue Klebold

The son of Sue Klebold, Dylan, together with his friend Eric, orchestrated a mass shooting at Columbine High School. They murdered twelve students and severely injured and traumatized twenty-four others. We can assume that Dylan together with Harris are blameworthy for this massacre. Dylan actively planned the massacre, bought the weapons, and knowingly murdered a number of people, severely injuring others. Sue Klebold did not know about Dylan's plans nor did she knowingly and voluntarily contributed to the massacre in any way.

Sue's response to the massacre caused by her son is a complex one. In her memoir she writes that "[i]n the days after Columbine, I filled notebook after notebook with words in an effort

to process my confusion and guilt and grief" (Klebold 2017, 19). On the one hand, Sue's memoir is filled with grief over her son's death. She writes that at the heart of everything she did after the massacre was grief and love for her son (Klebold 2017, 45, 77). Nevertheless, if her only response to the massacre were that of grief or regret that the massacre occurred, it seems that Sue would not appraise correctly the normative consequences Dylan's act had for her. It would be inappropriate and insulting for Sue to put herself in the same boat as the other parents who were grieving the loss of their children in the massacre. Even though she lost her own child in the massacre, she should not conceive of herself as a mere victim. Instead, she should recognize that she owes something in virtue of the wrongdoing done by their child and take some responsibility.

Sue does not limit her response to the massacre to that of grief. She expresses guilt and tries to make amends, seeks forgiveness, and offers apologies. Again, her response is layered. The guilt expressed by Sue may be seen as having two different objects: the suicide of her son, but also Dylan's killings.

First, Sue explicitly says that she feels guilty over Dylan's suicide. In an interview, she says that if she had an opportunity to speak to Dylan, "I would have ask him to forgive me, for being his mother and never knowing what was going on inside his head, for not being able to help him, for not being the person he could confide in" (Klebold, 2009). However, were her professed feeling of guilt limited only to the death of her son, we would think that there would be something deficient or even selfish in her response. It is true that the massacre also results in a personal tragedy for Sue – the loss of her son – for which she might hold herself responsible as his caregiver. However, expressing guilt (whether apt or not) only with regard to Dylan's death would seem like missing something important.

Sue expresses guilt not only over the suicide of her son but also over Dylan's killings. The feeling of guilt, seeking forgiveness, and making amends would be intelligible if we think, that Sue is at fault for the mass shooting. We might be tempted to think that 'for sure, she must have known about Dylan's plans or dispositions' or at the very least that as a parent, she should have known.

However, it is not obvious whether Sue is at fault for the massacre nor is it obvious that the sense of guilt over Dylan's killings results from Sue perceiving herself as being at fault for them.

Consider Sue's own assessment of her fault. In many places she does not want to refute it. In one of the interviews, she states, "I was the person who had raised 'a monster'" (Klebold, 2009). Moreover, she claims that the aim of her writing the memoir is not to clear her name (Klebold 2017, 14). This might suggest that Sue takes herself to be at fault. However, at the same time, she claims that there is nothing she could possibly do to stop Dylan on the fateful day and she denies that she could have known about his plans (Klebold 2017, 43).

Sue is gripped by anguish that had she and her husband done things differently, the massacre would not occur. Some of those counterfactual considerations are what philosophers call "circumstantial luck". Sue contemplates what would happen if they bought the house elsewhere? Or what if she never married Dylan's father? Others have to do with contemplating what they could have done differently as parents. However, such considerations are in themselves irrelevant to establish that Sue is at fault for the massacre. We would think that if Sue and her husband were overall decent parents, the failure to undertake such imagined steps would not constitute fault on their part, nor it seems that they should take those considerations to constitute their fault.[2]

However, Sue does not see her predicament as mere bad luck. We may think that if her response would be just focused on the fact that she has, in some sense, causally contributed to the massacre, it would again be, in some way, missing the mark of the kind of response that is adequate in this scenario. This is not to deny that some sense of anguish might be intelligible or even

[2] Perhaps what explains Sue's taking responsibility is the epistemic uncertainty she finds herself in regarding her contribution to the wrongdoing. It might be appropriate to take responsibility liberally when we are not sure whether we are at fault for the wrongdoing. Consider the case when you forget about an important birthday of your friend. It might not be super clear whether you have been attentive and careful enough, or whether, given the importance of the occasion you took all the precautions not to forget about it (e.g., by setting up a reminder in your phone). In such case, you did not have ill will, but it is genuinely not clear how much you should have done in order to remember about the birthday. Sometimes it is better to benefit someone by taking extra responsibility, rather than insult them by not taking enough. Similarly, it might be that when Sue takes responsibility for the actions of Dylan, it is not clear whether she was at fault, yet she wants to err on the side of caution. Sue might recognize that she is not in the best epistemic position to evaluate all the relevant evidence; hence it is better to defer to others to judge her culpability for the wrongdoing.

appropriate. However, it may also easily slide into an inappropriate response – potentially taking away from the seriousness of the wrongdoing or Dylan's own fault. In the end it is Dylan who is responsible for the massacre and the fact that in widely different circumstances he might not have been in a position to conduct the massacre does not seem to be the most relevant consideration.

Finally, Sue's fault is not probable given the evidence and assessment of the community and even the victims (Klebold 2017, 56; 78; 93). She receives plenty of feedback from others that they do not consider her at fault and the same conclusion is reached by the official investigation into the massacre. It would be illusive to think that the crimes committed by children are always traceable to the blameworthy actions of their caregivers. By all accounts, Sue was not a negligent or inattentive parent. Let's grant then that Sue is not blameworthy for the massacre.

Even though Sue herself does not construe herself as at fault, she claims that she continues to feel guilt and regret for Dylan's killings (Klebold 2017, 212). Moreover, she claims that one of the reasons she wrote the memoir was in order to offer a proper apology to the victims of her son ("Saying I am profoundly sorry is one of the reasons I wanted to write this book" Klebold 2017, 281). She says that she wanted "to apologize to the families in person at the depositions, but [her] lawyers didn't agree"; adding that the absence of apology "was deeply felt by everyone in the room, and continues to be, to this day" (Klebold 2017, 281).

Though the feeling of guilt and the disposition to offer apologies or seek forgiveness are not fitting for third parties, the fact that Sue is the parent of the shooter seems to make her responses appropriate and intelligible. Even though she wasn't the author of those harms, there is a sense in which they belong to her, in virtue of her relationship with Dylan.

1.1.2. Rainer Höss

Chanoch Ze'evi, in his documentary *Hitler's Children,* meets with the descendants of high-profile Nazi criminals. One of the interviewees is Rainer Höss, the grandson of Rudolf Höss. Rudolf Höss

was responsible for the extermination of 2.5 million people as a commandant of the Auschwitz concentration camp and he personally initiated the new method of extermination using Zyklon-B. Rudolf Höss is morally blameworthy for the genocide. Rainer was born 18 years after his grandfather's execution and had no involvement or contribution to the mass killings. Despite this, he reports that he carries guilt in his mind and feels ashamed of what his family did (Ze'evi, 2011). Rainer's guilt arises from his relation to his grandfather and not from any wrongdoing on his part. He engages in conversations with the families of the victims of the atrocities caused by his grandfather, offering apologies, which are perceived as significant acts of reparation (Ze'evi, 2011).

Why Rainer responds to the crimes of his grandfather by undertaking the affective burden of guilt and making reparations (by apologizing to the descendants of the victims of the crimes)? One might argue that Rainer's response expresses the thought that he is subject to circumstantial moral luck (Nagel 1978, 145). Perhaps Rainer is aware that if he lived in the time of Nazi rule, he might have contributed to the atrocities. It is not unintelligible for him to think "This could have been me". This may explain why he feels self-punitive attitudes. We may therefore think that Rainer experiences a kind of existential anxiety, one related to the reflection that given different circumstances he could have acted in the way his grandfather did.

I think it might be true that something like this existential anxiety might be involved in the case of Rainer. Moreover, one might think that such anxiety is appropriate and should lead Rainer to experience humility and perhaps something like pity toward his grandfather. However, Rainer's stance seems to be more ambiguous. Even if he experiences existential anxiety, he at the same time blames his grandfather severely. When the Israeli students ask Rainer what he would do, if he could confront his grandfather, Rainer tells them that he would kill him (Ze'evi 2011). The severe blaming attitude does not preclude the possibility of existential angst. Nor is his blame directed towards his grandfather any less sincere given the thought that Rainer could have acted similarly, were he in a different historical circumstance.

1.2. The Explicatory Challenge

In the previous section I have introduced the two central cases of the social phenomenon I examine in this thesis and suggested that we may conceptualize the responses of Sue and Rainer as taking responsibility. Now, I turn to the explicatory challenge outlined at the start: what exactly do I mean by saying that we can take responsibility for actions of others? To answer this question, it is important to clarify the concept of 'taking responsibility' I will be concerned with. I differentiate between three ways of taking responsibility – acknowledging blame, undertaking obligations, and accepting normative consequences of one's actions - and examine which of them is the most promising way to make sense of the cases above.[3] I conclude that out of the three options we may plausibly think that Sue and Rainer take responsibility for actions of their relatives in the third sense: they accept the normative consequences (e.g. obligations to 'feel bad', apologize, make repairs) which stem from the wrongful conduct of their relatives.

1.2.1. Acknowledging blame

The first way in which we may take responsibility is by accepting blame. Typically, when a person rejects blame for what they have done, we say that they failed to take responsibility – provided the blame was appropriate. Conversely, when a person accepts that they are blameworthy, thereby an appropriate target of blame, we think that this person, in some minimal sense, took responsibility for their action.

With this simple picture in mind, can we understand the cases of Sue and Rainer as accepting blame for the wrongs done by others? We might be tempted to do so. After all, they all

[3] For a similar distinction of different senses of taking responsibility see Goetze (2021).

experience all sorts of self-directed reactive affect— blame, guilt, shame—that normally accompany judgement blameworthiness.

However, by stipulation, neither Sue nor Rainer is at fault for the wrongs done by their relatives. It is widely assumed that blame is only appropriate if the agent is at fault. For instance, Fricker writes that "blame is out of order when one does bad things through no fault of one's own. If no fault, then no appropriate blame" (2014, 170).[4] There is a good rationale behind this. We want to distinguish blame from other responses such as disappointment or sadness and we cannot do so without claiming that the target of blame is moral fault.

Perhaps, we may think that Sue and Rainer make themselves liable to blame at their will. We sometimes find instances of people taking blame *on behalf* of someone else. A wife who accepts the blame for her husband's failure could be taking responsibility in this sense. Often those cases are instances of manipulation, coercion, or bullying. Or an individual who takes on blame on behalf of someone else does so in order to preserve the good name of the other person. However, we may doubt that one can make oneself liable for blame at one's will: even if a person succeeded at redirecting the blame from someone else at themselves, blame in such cases would not be appropriate. Moreover, in the cases above, neither Sue nor Rainer denies that their relatives are blameworthy. If they did so, we could see it as a failure to take responsibility on their part.

1.2.2. Undertaking obligations

There is a sense of taking responsibility which involves a voluntary decision to assume certain obligations and is accompanied by a commitment to follow through on that decision. For example, when I take responsibility as a coordinator of a certain project, I assume various obligations that are associated with the role of the coordinator. Taking responsibility in this sense also involves a

[4] Similar claims are made by Susan Wolf (2001, 9).

readiness to accept accountability in case one fails to fulfil the assumed obligation. If I fail to fulfil my responsibilities and the project fails, all things being equal, others can blame me.

David Enoch (2012) proposes that taking responsibility as assuming obligations may explain special cases like those of Sue and Rainer. Enoch explicitly denies that we can be morally responsible for the wrongs done by others. At the same time, Enoch thinks that even though agents like Sue and Rainer are not responsible for the relevant events, "there would be something wrong . . . if all [they] did was to (correctly) point out that these actions are not [theirs]" (Enoch 2012, 98). He wants to vindicate that intuition.

Enoch argues that we should think of taking responsibility for actions of others as exercising "a normative power". To exercise a normative power is to change one's set of obligations through an act of will that *aims* at bringing about this change (Sliwa 2023, 8). For example, when I promise to come to your party, I incur an obligation to come to your party and I intend to incur this obligation. Enoch wants to model taking responsibility for wrongs done by others on other normative powers such as making a promise:

> This is the way in which taking responsibility is analogous not to acknowledging a duty that is already there independently of the acknowledging, but rather to undertaking a duty (or obligation, or commitment). In this sense, when I take responsibility for something—and when the other necessary conditions are in place —I thereby become responsible (Enoch 2012, 105).

The exercise of that normative power extends the sphere of one's responsibility by creating obligations that were not there before the exercise of the normative power. For Enoch, by taking responsibility for X, I *make* myself obligated "to justify X (or the relevant X-related thing), or to offer an excuse for it, or to apologize for it, or to explain it, or something of this sort" (Enoch 2012, 119). Applying Enoch's model to the examples above we would say that Sue and Rainer place themselves under obligation to apologize, make certain acts of recompense, or even to feel bad for the wrongdoings of their relatives, thereby making themselves responsible.

Moreover, according to Enoch, in certain situations like that of Sue and Rainer, we are *morally required* to assume that set of obligations by taking responsibility. He suggests that just as we can sometimes be morally required to make a promise, in cases of wrongs done by our near and dear, we are morally required to take responsibility, "where this taking makes a difference to the responsibility-facts." (Enoch 2012, 101).

Enoch's account tries to have it both ways. He denies that we can be morally responsible for the wrongs done by others. At the same time, he tries to explain why we (sometimes) ought to apologize and engage in moral repair for the wrongs that were committed by our near and dear. I agree that if Sue and Rainer were not to take responsibility, we would judge their response as problematic or significantly lacking. However, I don't think we would say that they failed to exercise their normative power to create the duty to apologize. Rather, we would simply say that they failed to apologize, where the duty to apologize is already there. Even though Enoch is right to point out that there is a sense of taking responsibility that involves something like exercising our normative power, this explanation seems implausible in these cases. If I am right, then Enoch's explanation of taking responsibility for wrongs done by others involves a redundant step: for Sue and Rainer there is no need to assume new obligations; the obligations, we may think, are already there.

1.2.3. Accepting normative consequences

Here is the third way to think about taking responsibility.[5] When we do something wrong, our action gives rise to a range of duties and obligations, including the duty to apologize, explain, and make amends. This is a different mechanism than the one that is involved in assuming obligation

[5] This approach is inspired by Paulina Sliwa's (2023, forthcoming) account of taking responsibility, however, I modified some details of the account and terminology. The central idea of owning one's obligations, belongs to Sliwa.

through an exercise of a normative power. It is a feature of normative powers that the agent exercises them intentionally: one cannot make a promise if one does not intend to create a promissory obligation (Sliwa 2023, 8). On the other hand, when we do something wrong, we typically do not intend to create various obligations. We may intend to do something wrong, however, the changes in our obligations that stem from the wrongdoing are normally unwanted (Ibid).

Drawing on Sliwa (2023), I claim that taking responsibility involves accepting the obligations that one's action has generated. What is it to accept our obligations? To accept the obligations that one's wrong has generated is "to see oneself as bound by it" (Sliwa 2023, 8). The attitude of acceptance has both a cognitive and a motivational component. The cognitive component involves recognizing the normative consequences of the wrongdoing – "it's knowing that, for example, one has reparative duties and feeling duties, as well as knowing…their content" (Sliwa 2023, 8). The motivational component involves an intention, commitment, or motivation to discharge those duties (Sliwa 2023, 8). Hence, I take responsibility for revealing my friend's secret I have promised to keep, when I know that I ought to apologize, feel bad, make amends, and I am motivated to do so.

This way of thinking about taking responsibility is different from the previous two. In contrast to the first one, one does not have to be at fault to accept the obligations that one's actions have generated. Faultless failures may also generate certain obligations, e.g., the obligation to make repair, or even apologize. Unlike the second sense of taking responsibility, the obligations stem from the wrong done by the agent, rather than from an exercise of a normative power.

Can we make sense of the cases of Sue and Rainer as instances of accepting normative consequences? If it is plausible that Sue and Rainer already have the obligations to apologize, make amends, and so on, then we may think that the extra step of exercising a normative power to incur obligations, proposed by Enoch, is redundant in their cases. When Sue and Rainer take responsibility for the misconduct of their relatives, they accept the obligations that result from

their relatives' wrongdoing. Rather than *making themselves* responsible, as Enoch has it; the agents already *are responsible* (Sliwa 2023, 12-13). However, it is important to emphasize that they do not accept the normative consequences that belong to the transgressor, nor do they discharge those obligations on their behalf. The changes in obligations induced by wrongdoing affect not just the duties and rights of the wrongdoer and wronged party but have effects on the duties of those who stand in certain relationships to the wrongdoer.

1.3. The Vindicatory Challenge

In the previous section, I provided a way to address the explicatory challenge, namely, in what sense can we think of taking responsibility for actions of others? Drawing on Sliwa, I argued that we may think of taking responsibility for actions of others in terms of accepting the normative consequences that stem from the actions of others. Crucially, taking responsibility in this sense does not involve accepting the obligations on behalf of the wrongdoer. Rather what happens is that the wrongdoer's action gives rise to various normative consequences that the relatives need to accept. Moreover, it helps us to vindicate the intuition that what agents do in those cases is *not* accepting that they are blameworthy, in the fault-implying sense. I will return to the question of what may explain the fact that the actions of our near and dear affect what normative consequences we should accept in Chapter 3. Before doing that, I will address the second challenge: the vindicatory challenge.

We may ask: how do we vindicate the practice in which a person A takes responsibility for the misconduct of another person B, when A would have been considered faultless or not responsible for the misdeeds if we only considered their own conduct? In other words, how is it possible to take responsibility for an action without any prior exercise of agency on the part of the person who takes responsibility for the action? *Pima facie*, such practice does not appear to be fully acceptable. In order to address the vindicatory challenge in a comprehensive manner, I will employ

the method of *paradigm-based explanation* of the practice of taking responsibility. The main aim of paradigm-based explanation is to provide an account of the purpose of internally diverse practice, as exemplified in the paradigm case of the practice. The method allows us to illuminate not only the function the practice serves in the paradigmatic form, but also helps us vindicate the non-paradigmatic forms of the practice by showing that they serve the same purpose as the paradigm form (Fricker 2014, 166).

In Chapter 2, I provide a functionalist account of taking responsibility for our own actions. I argue that the practice of taking responsibility for wrongdoing serves an important function of repairing moral relationships between the wrongdoer and the wronged party. I characterize a paradigmatic form of taking responsibility — Communicated Taking of Responsibility. Next, in section 2.2., drawing on Pamela Hieronymi's (2001) account of forgiveness, I argue that the past wrong, if not properly marked as a wrong makes a claim that the treatment is acceptable. Based on her insight, I argue that the *point* of taking responsibility, as revealed by its paradigmatic form, is to counteract the mistreatment that otherwise persists in the aftermath of wrongdoing. By taking responsibility for my misdeeds, I put forward a new way of treating the person that counteracts (but does not deny) the significance of the past mistreatment.

In Chapter 3, I argue that the practice of taking responsibility for wrongs done by others serves the function of repairing moral relationships between the innocent relatives of the wrongdoer and their victims. I argue that wrongs done by our relatives may thrust us into interpersonal antagonism which has many features of wrongdoing. By taking responsibility innocent relatives take the first step in mending the antagonistic relations. Therefore, we can think of taking responsibility for wrongs done by others as taking responsibility *proper*.

2. What's the point of taking responsibility for wrongs?

When we take responsibility for our wrongdoings, we are *doing* something: we acknowledge the wrongdoing ("What I did was wrong"), accept responsibility ("I am responsible for wronging you"), express various negative emotions such as guilt, remorse, shame, regret; offer apologies and seek forgiveness ("I am very sorry for harming you! Please forgive me!"), we also make amends and offer reparatory gestures. These various responses suggest that there is a practice of taking responsibility that we regularly participate in – a social activity regulated by internal norms.[6] The point of our practices is to advance some of our needs and interests. The aim of this chapter is to explain the *function* of the practice of taking responsibility for wrongdoing - what the practice is for.[7] I will argue that the practice of taking responsibility for wrongdoing serves an important function of repairing moral relationships between the wrongdoer and the wronged party. The argument of this chapter is an important step to explain and vindicate the phenomenon of taking responsibility for wrongs done by others, which is the central focus of my thesis. In Chapter 3, I will argue that the practice of taking responsibility for wrongs done by others serves the function of repairing moral relationships between the innocent relatives of the wrongdoer and their victims. Therefore, we can think of taking responsibility for wrongs done by others as taking responsibility *proper*.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. In section 2.1., I characterize a paradigmatic form of taking responsibility — Communicated Taking of Responsibility. Next, in section 2.2., I argue that the *point* of taking responsibility, as revealed by its paradigmatic form, is to counteract the mistreatment that otherwise persists in the aftermath of wrongdoing. Drawing on Pamela

[6] In my characterization of social practice I draw on Rawls (1955, 3).
[7] My account is limited to the practice of taking responsibility for wrongdoing. The more general practice of taking responsibility will also plausibly involve taking responsibility for the praiseworthy or even morally neutral actions. Since my focus is on the reparative function of the practice, I take it that excluding other forms of taking responsibility is appropriate.

Hieronymi's (2001) discussion of resentment, I argue that the past wrong, if not properly renounced, makes a claim that it is an acceptable way of treating the person. By taking responsibility for one's misdeeds, one puts forward a new way of treating the person that counteracts (but does not deny) the meaning of the past mistreatment. Finally, in section 2.3., I explain how taking responsibility for one's own wrongdoing serves an important function of repairing moral relationships between the wrongdoer and the wronged party.

2.1. Communicated Taking of Responsibility

The aim of this chapter is to argue that taking responsibility for wrongdoings serves an important function of repairing those moral relationships. To do so, I introduce a paradigmatic form of taking responsibility which reveals how taking responsibility serves the postulated function in a comprehensive way. The form I consider paradigmatic takes place between two persons and is communicated, I label this form Communicated Taking of Responsibility (CTR).

Consider the following case of wrongdoing:

> *Broken Promise.* Elinor has an important dance performance during the weekend. She asks Martin if he would come to her performance to support her. She says that it would make a huge difference for her, knowing there is a friendly and supportive face in the audience. Martin promises that she can count on him, and he will gladly show up and support her. However, when the day comes Martin feels very tired and not in the mood to go anywhere – he'd much rather stay at home. He procrastinates, postponing his departure for the performance. As a result, he arrives late and is not allowed inside.

The appropriate response for Martin is to take responsibilityWe may intuitively think that Martin's response should include the following components for it to count as taking responsibility.

First, it is important that Martin identifies the wrongdoing and acknowledge its nature. In this specific scenario, you wronged your friend by breaking the promise. If Martin merely said "I'm sorry this hurt your feelings" we could doubt whether he fully appreciates the nature of the

wrongdoing that occurred. Sure, Elinor's feelings might have been hurt and it's important to take that into account, but the more pertinent problem is that Martin broke his promise.

Second, it is crucial that Martin accepts responsibility *for* the wrongdoing. This may mean acknowledging that it was his fault that he broke the promise. It is crucial that Martin accepts responsibility *for* the wrongdoing, which in this case is breaking a promise, rather than merely accepting responsibility for other consequences of his actions.

Third, it is crucial that Martin accepts various 'normative consequences' of his action. By 'normative consequences' I mean various duties, rights, obligations, demands, and expectations that are generated by one's wrongful conduct. For example, when I break a promise to my friend, this alters the normative landscape in several ways (Sliwa 2023, 6). First, it creates certain reparatory rights for my friend and duties for me. They are entitled to expect an apology, explanation, etc. and I am obligated to fulfil the corresponding duties. Second, the breaking of the promise might modify what kind of affective attitude is fitting. My friend may aptly feel disappointed or resentful. For me it may be fitting to experience guilt, anguish, or remorse. Third, the wrongdoing changes the relationship between us. I may no longer be trusted or perceived as a person of goodwill. In taking responsibility for one's wrongful conduct Martin needs to accept all those modifications to the normative landscape. Crucially, accepting the normative consequences involves not only believing them to be true but also committing oneself or forming an intention to act in accordance with them.

Finally, Martin needs to communicate that he takes responsibility. The communication of taking responsibility need not be verbal. Just as there may be non-verbal communication, there may be non-verbal taking of responsibility. Often to successfully take responsibility we need to do something – discharge the various obligations that our action has generated. Sometimes, it is enough that a person expresses guilt or we can see that they evidently feel sorry. What is important is that in that the taking of responsibility is not merely private (I will return to this point later).

Based on this prototypical scenario, I'd like to propose the following schematic characterisation of the paradigmatic form of taking responsibility for wrongs.

CTR. Person *A* takes responsibility for wrong if,

(i) A acknowledges the nature of the wrong and the moral status of the wronged party.
(ii) A accepts responsibility for the wrong.
(iii) A recognizes the normative consequences of one's wrongdoing.
(iv) A commits to fulfilling the normative consequences.
(v) Taking of responsibility is performed.
(vi) Being performed, the act of taking responsibility communicates (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), to the wronged party.

To be clear, this is not an account of taking responsibility. I do not claim that any of those components are necessary for taking responsibility. Rather, it is a characterisation of a single scenario of taking responsibility that I consider as paradigmatic for my purposes. Having formulated the paradigmatic form of responsibility and illustrated it with a specific case, there remains the following question: Why think that CTR is the paradigmatic case of responsibility? To address this question, I will take the following steps. *First*, I postulate that the function of taking responsibility for wrongdoing is to repair moral relationships between the wrongdoer and the wronged party. *Second*, I argue the postulated function of repairing moral relationships is fulfilled when taking responsibility is communicated. Hence, we can plausibly think of the Communicated Taking of Responsibility as explanatorily basic with respect to the postulated function of the practice.

2.2. The function of Communicated Taking of Responsibility

In the previous section I have characterised a paradigm case of taking responsibility for wrongs: Communicated Taking of Responsibility. In this section, I will argue that the practice of taking responsibility for wrongdoings serves an important function of repairing moral relationships

between the wrongdoer and the wronged party. Before I explain exactly how Communicated Taking of Responsibility serves the postulated function, I will (1) characterize the notion of moral relationships and (2) explain how wrongdoing damages moral relationships between the wrongdoer and the wronged party.

2.2.1. Moral relationships

Drawing on Margaret Urban Walker, by "moral relationships" I mean a particular mode of relating to one another that is anchored in mutual normative expectations (Walker 2006, 23). Being in moral relationships involves viewing others and ourselves as responsible beings who are bound by normative expectations, including, but not limited to, expectations we consider morally significant - which can sometimes be clearly distinguished from social or conventional expectations (Walker 2006, 67-69).

Normative expectations should be distinguished from predictive expectations as they hold individuals responsible for their actions and demand compliance even when there is no reason to be optimistic about it (Walker 2006, 23-24). When Elinor says that "I expect Martin to be at my performance" she may simply *predict* Martin's presence. She can infer from his past behaviour that he, in fact, will show up. However, Elinor does not necessarily mean Martin *should* do what she expects. Yet, when she says "I expect Martin to be at my performance," and the expectation she expresses is a *normative* one, then what she means is that she is *holding Martin responsible* to show up at her performance. The latter is the kind of expectation she has if she believes that Martin's appearance is something he ought to do, because he has given a promise, or because he knows she is counting on him to appear then. Her normative expectation reflects a kind of *entitlement* that Martin will behave in a particular way (Walker 2006, 24).

Normative expectations underwrite how we guide ourselves through human interactions. Our reliance on fellow individuals within our human society depends on their supposed sense of

responsibility (Walker 2006, 25). We are relying on others assuming that there are established rules and that others generally adhere to them and enforce compliance or make amends when necessary. These expectations embody a sense of entitlement and demand for compliance with certain standards. When others do not meet normative expectations, their behaviour can evoke a variety of responses – we may blame or resent them, we may demand an explanation for their behaviour, or withhold trust from them. Finally, when we fail to live up to the normative expectations we might offer gestures of restitution, apologise, and experience self-directed reactive attitudes such as guilt, self-directed anger, or blame.

So, normative expectations refer to the shared expectations of behaviour that people have towards themselves and others, based on what they believe to be right and wrong. They are characteristic of a certain way of relating to one another – standing in moral relationships. When we stand in moral relationships with one another we expect ourselves and others to behave in a particular way that is governed by shared standards, and we expect that others will be responsive in their behaviour to those standards.

Moreover, we have an interest in there being moral relationships. First, as noted by Walker, there is a pragmatic interest (Walker 2006, 23). This way of coordinating our social interactions distinguishes itself from alternative methods that people employ to influence the behaviour of others. These alternative methods, such as coercion, violence, or manipulation, depend on compelling others rather than promoting voluntary adherence to shared norms and values (Walker 2006, 24).

However, we also have a normative interest in there being moral relationships. When we experience harm done by others, it is in our interest that some individuals not only explain the situation to us, follow up on our well-being, apologize, or make amends, but also recognize that they can be *expected* to do so. The existence of these normative interests is essential because it demonstrates that the harm we have experienced is not merely a random event or a mere damage that can be processed through an insurance company. Instead, it is an occurrence that requires

interpersonal moral recognition. Moreover, it is important for the party that was wronged to be entitled to certain expectations from others. Such control is essential for us to maintain our status as genuine moral agents rather than mere patients who have suffered harm. The ability to participate actively in the moral aftermath of the harm prevents us from being objectified and degraded, thereby affirming our worthiness of respect.

Moreover, maintaining moral relationships is also important for each individual: we are invested in the attitudes, perceptions, and dispositions of others. Any well-socialized agent cares whether other agents see them as well-intentioned, trustworthy, reliable, etc. How we are perceived by others plays an important role in our moral relationships. To participate in moral relationships, I need to be able to recognize the normative expectations that should guide my conduct, however, to function as an eligible participant in those relationships, I have to be perceived by others as someone capable of doing so.

2.2.2. The damaging effects of wrongdoing

So far, I have characterised the notion of moral relationships and motivated the claim that we have an interest in sustaining them. Now I will explore how wrongdoing can damage moral relationships between the wrongdoer and the wronged party.

To fully appreciate the damaging effect of the wrongdoing it's important to recognize that wrongdoing involves a mistreatment of the victim, beyond the material harm imposed on them. I take this insight from Pamela Hieronymi's discussion of forgiveness. Consider the following remark by Hieronymi:

> [A] past wrong against you, standing in your history without apology, atonement, retribution, punishment, restitution, condemnation, or anything else that might recognize it as a wrong, makes a claim. It says, in effect, that you can be treated in this way, and that such treatment is acceptable (Hieronymi, 2001, 546).

For Hieronymi, a wrongdoing has "social meaning" — when I wrong someone, my action "makes a claim" that it is acceptable to treat the person in this way (2001, 550). As Hieronymi admits, saying that the wrong "makes a claim" might be elusive at first glance. She goes on to clarify:

> An event can make a claim when it is authored, that is, when it is an action. An action carries meaning by revealing the evaluations of its author. The event could not make a claim or carry meaning (positive or negative) if its perpetrator were not capable of making moral statements with [their] actions (Hieronymi 2001, 546-547).

One way to understand Hieronymi's insight is to say that actions have meanings that are determined by the evaluations, intentions, and reasons that an agent acts from. To illustrate, consider the following example which I adapt from Scanlon (2008, 52). The meaning of my phone call to a sick family member varies depending on why I'm calling; it depends on what are my reasons for calling. It is one thing if I'm calling because I'm truly concerned about their well-being. The action would have a different meaning if I'm calling just to make my rich grandfather happy and appear like I care, even though I'm really indifferent and just do so because I expect a large inheritance. Finally, the action would have a completely different meaning if I'm calling because I dislike this relative and want to hear them sound weak. Specifically, wrongdoing involves treating the victim as if it is acceptable to wrong them in the manner that was done.

However, Hieronymi also points out that actions can have "social meanings" (2001, 550), which may suggest that the claim that action makes is not solely a function of the actual evaluations of its author. I can act in ways that are objectively disrespectful, indifferent, and insulting regardless of what are my intentions behind those actions. For instance, when I turn my back on someone as they speak to me my action is objectively disrespectful, even if the reason I am turning my back is because I got distracted. I may behave towards a person as if their words do not matter, even if in fact I hold them in high regard, but I am too distracted to engage with them.

Moreover, individuals can act in a way that indicates that the wrong is acceptable, even if they believe that the wrong is unacceptable. For example, suppose you are engaged in a conversation over dinner with your friend. Suddenly, your friend erupts rudely toward the waiter.

You believe that your friend's behaviour was unacceptable, however, you resume the conversation you had before the incident. If you do not react in any way towards the behaviour of your friend, acting completely indifferently, then you are effectively acting as though the behaviour was acceptable. Others, especially the waiter, can reasonably interpret your behaviour as condoning the abusive act of your companion, regardless of your actual beliefs.

So, I take it that we can plausibly think that the meaning of an action, the claim that action makes, is not solely the function of the evaluations of the agent that performed the action, but that it is also determined by how others can reasonably interpret the meaning of our action.

Hieronymi further says that "the meaning of the misdeed, i.e. the threatening claim, persists in social space" unless it is properly "marked" or "contested" (2001, 550). This I think is a very plausible claim. I interpret Hieronymi as saying that the effect brought by wrongdoing is two-fold: (1) by choosing to engage in the wrongful action one demonstrates a behaviour towards the victim that implies they can be treated in such a manner; (2) by continuing to interact with the victim in the same manner as before the offence —without taking appropriate action in response to the wrong (in Hieronymi's terms, by not "marking" it as wrong) — one treats the victim as if it is acceptable to have wronged them. Suppose that Martin, after breaking the promise, continues acting towards Elinor as if nothing happened – that is, as if he didn't wrong her. He meets Elinor the day after the performance and asks her as if nothing happened, "How was your performance yesterday?". He acts as if he hadn't broken the promise and mistreated Elinor. As a result, he diminishes the seriousness of his past action and his past action continues to make a threatening claim.

To sum up the discussion so far. When someone wrongs another and continues to behave exactly as they did prior to the wrongdoing, without any change in their treatment of the victim, it constitutes an act of treating the victim as if the wrongdoing is acceptable. In other words, this sequence of actions—(a) committing the wrongdoing, and (b) persisting in the same behavior

towards the victim— jointly represents a manner of treating the victim as if the act of wrongdoing was permissible.

2.2.3. The reparative function of CTR

Now, I will explain how taking responsibility for wrongdoing can remedy the effects of wrongdoing. It is important to note when attempting to provide such an explanation, that one should not depict taking responsibility as capable of rectifying all or even most of the harm caused by a wrongdoing. Words alone cannot heal a carelessly broken arm, mend a broken promise, or fully restore a person's tarnished reputation. If taking responsibility contributes to moral repair, it may be by merely alleviating some of the inflicted harm or mitigating additional morally undesirable consequences that accompany the primary transgression. The question then is which aspects of the wrong could taking responsibility potentially alter?

I argue that in taking responsibility one can counteract the meaning of the past wrong that otherwise would persist as a threat. By taking responsibility we cannot undo the past wrong and trying to do so would itself be problematic, however, we may change the present meaning the wrong has. By taking responsibility for wrongs, we put forward a new way of treating the wronged party that counteracts the past mistreatment. This function, I believe, is best served in the paradigmatic form of taking responsibility – Communicated Taking of Responsibility.

Suppose that after breaking the promise Martin forms a belief that what he did was wrong and he shouldn't treat Elinor in this way. Moreover, suppose that he feels bad about it – he experiences guilt or remorse for failing his friend. However, him having the correct doxastic or affective attitude is insufficient to denounce the claim that his wrongful action makes, unless he communicates it to the wronged party. To further appreciate the importance of communication in taking responsibility, suppose that Elinor learns about Martin's beliefs and emotional reaction. Though it may bring some comfort to her, knowing that he takes the transgression seriously, it

would be still perfectly appropriate for her to say, "I'm glad that he feels bad about what he did, but he still should apologize to me".

So, to serve the purpose of counteracting the meaning of the past wrong taking of responsibility needs to be communicated. Without communicating that I took responsibility for the wrong, the other person may still reasonably think that I consider the past mistreatment as acceptable.

2.3. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explain how the practice of taking responsibility for wrongdoings serves an important social function of repairing moral relationships. I argued that taking responsibility serves as a counteractive way of treating the wronged party and commits the wrongdoer to the shared normative standards. In taking responsibility for our wrongdoings, we affirm our responsibility as wrongdoers, we affirm the significance of the wrongdoing, the moral significance of the wronged person as someone who should not be treated in the way we treated them. Such affirmation may remove the threat that the past wrongdoing poses – by communicating our correct understanding of the wrongdoing, the moral worth of the wronged person as someone who should not be mistreated, and our understanding as agents responsible for the wrongdoing it put forward a new way of treating the victim. In this way, taking responsibility can counteract the mistreatment that otherwise remains in the aftermath of wrongdoing and opens up a possibility of resuming normal moral relationships between the wrongdoer and the wronged party.

3. Taking responsibility for wrongs done by others

In the rest of the thesis, I focus on a particular non-paradigmatic form of the practice of taking responsibility – taking responsibility for wrongs done by others. My central claim is that the practice of taking responsibility for actions of others serves a function of repairing moral relationships – as evidenced in the paradigm case of the practice. More specifically, I argue that taking responsibility for the misdeeds of those close to us may repair the moral relationships between the victims and the relatives of the wrongdoer. To reach my conclusion I have to explain (1) how the wrongdoing damages the moral relationships between the innocent relatives of the wrongdoers and their victims and (2) how taking responsibility for the wrongs done by others serves this reparative function.

In answer to the first question, I argue that the wrongs done by our relatives may thrust innocent relatives into an *interpersonal antagonism* with the victims. Victims may *reasonably* perceive the relatives of the transgressor as a threat in virtue of a (presumed) partiality of relatives towards the transgressor. Crucially, the perception of relatives as a threat does not need to involve the belief that the relatives are sharing responsibility for the wrongdoing. As a result, the victims may justifiably withhold trust from the blameless relatives of the wrongdoer, they may shun from associating with them, and they may not consider the relatives of the wrongdoer as potential friends, even when they know that the relatives are not at fault. Thus, the antagonism has effects on the moral relationship between the parties.

In answer to the second problem, I argue that in taking responsibility for wrongs done by their near and dear, the relatives put forward a way of treating the victims that affirms their moral status, acknowledges the nature of the wrongdoing, and assigns the responsibility of the wrongdoer. By performing such acts, the blameless relatives communicate to the victims that they are committed to maintaining moral relationships which may facilitate the resumption of normal moral relationships between them and the victims.

3.1. The reparative gestures of Sue and Rainer

Before I explain how wrongs done by others can repair moral relationships between the relatives and the victims, let me return to the cases I introduced at the beginning and motivate the claim that in taking responsibility Sue and Rainer engage in a reparative activity.

Both Sue and Rainer engage in what we may describe as reparatively significant responses with the victims of the crimes committed by their family members. [8] After publicly apologizing for the massacre, Sue decided "to handwrite letters of apology to each of the families". She adds: "I wasn't foolish enough to believe there were any words that could ever suffice. But I needed to let the families know the depth of my sorrow for what they had suffered at my son's hand." (Klebold 2017, 118). In her memoir, Sue describes several interactions with the members of victims' families that responded to her letters:

> We have had some contact with a few of the victims' family members over the years, and I believe it *was* healing, for both parties. The father of a boy who died reached out to us about a year after the tragedy. We invited him to our home in December 2001. I was stunned by his generosity of spirit and found great relief in being able to apologize to him in person for Dylan's actions, and to express our sorrow for his terrible loss. We wept, shared photos, and talked about our children. When we parted, he said he didn't hold us responsible. They were the most blessed words I could have hoped to hear him say. (Klebold 2017, 279)

Similarly, Rainer interacts with the victims in a reparatively significant way. In the documentary, we follow Rainer in his visit to Auschwitz, where he interacts with a group of Israeli students and several other visitors. One of the students tells Rainer that her family was exterminated by his grandfather; she then turns to the group of people surrounding them and asks: "isn't he afraid of these encounters with us?" (Ze'evi 2011). Rainer also meets with a Holocaust survivor who asks whether he could shake Rainer's hand. Next, they embrace each other and the survivor says to

[8] A similar point about the reparative significance of the responses by relatives of the wrongdoer is made by Telech (2022, 248).

Rainer: "You weren't there. You didn't do it. You didn't do it". Previously, a little bit detached, Rainer starts to cry (Ibid). Reflecting on the interaction with the survivor, Rainer says that "[f]or the first time, you don't feel fear or shame, but happiness, joy, inner joy, to receive the approval of someone who survived these horrors, and knows for sure that it wasn't you, that you didn't do it" (Ibid). Crucially, neither the survivor nor Rainer comes to learn something new regarding Rainer's responsibility for the Holocaust from the interaction. The significance of this interaction seems to lie in its reparative effect (cf. Telech 2022, 248).

3.2. Interpersonal antagonism

The aim of this chapter is to argue that taking responsibility for wrongs done by others serves the function of repairing moral relationships between the innocent relatives of the transgressors and the victims. As shown in the previous section, the interactions between the victims and the innocent relatives can be seen as having an important reparative significance. The first step to defend this claim is to explain how the wrongdoing may damage the moral relationships between the innocent relatives and the victims.

The claim that the wrongdoing damages moral relationships between relatives of the transgressor and the victims is by no means obvious when we assume, as I do here, that the relatives do not share responsibility for the wrongdoing. As discussed in *Chapter 1*, I take it that Sue and Rainer neither are at fault for the wrongs done by their relatives; nor are they *perceived* as being at fault by themselves or others. This is clear in the case of Rainer who was born years after the crimes committed by his grandfather: he cannot be responsible for something that happened before his birth and no one perceives him as such. Sue's case is more complicated. However, I argued that we can plausibly assume that she did not culpably contribute to the wrongdoing and that others (including many of the victims) do not consider her at fault. Therefore, what explains the damage to the moral relationships between them and the victims is *not* the fact that either of

them shares responsibility with the wrongdoers or that they are perceived as being at fault by others.

To explain how wrongs done by their relatives affect the moral relationships of Sue and Rainer with the victims, I argue that the wrongs done by our relatives may thrust us into an *interpersonal antagonism*.[9] The antagonistic relations between the innocent relatives and victims have a phenomenological dimension: the victims perceive the relatives as a threat and the relatives may feel alienated and separated from the victims. However, the antagonism also has many features of the wrongdoing: the wronged parties may withhold trust from the relatives of the wrongdoer or they may shun from associating with the relatives.

Support for the idea that the actions of our relatives may put us in antagonistic relations with their victims can be found in Sue's testimony. When imagining the sorrow of the mothers who lost their children in the massacre, Sue writes, that "[f]or a split second, I felt…like I was part of a community of people who were grieving" (Klebold 2017, 72). However, she adds that "[though] I wanted to feel close to [other mothers], and I did, … I was the last person on earth [they] would allow to offer [them] words of comfort, and the sense of isolation and grief and guilt following so quickly on the heels of that sense of connection devastated me" (Ibid). Sue is separated from the victims by antagonism that was caused by her son's actions, despite feelings of sympathy towards the victims.[10] Similarly, there is a felt antagonism between Rainer and the victims of his grandfather. One of the students present in Auschwitz told Rainer that her family was exterminated by his grandfather. The student then turns to other descendants of the victims and asks whether Rainer isn't afraid of meeting with them (Ze'evi, 2011). Even though Rainer is not

[9]A related notion of "personal antagonism" can be found in David Sussman's (2018) account of the rationality of agent-regret. Discussing an example of a driver who innocently injures a pedestrian, Sussman writes that "the truck driver comes to stand toward [the pedestrian] as a kind of innocent threat" (2018, 502). According to Sussman, the pedestrian could justifiably inflict harm the driver to avoid the injury, even though the driver is innocent.

[10] This sense of antagonism also pervaded how Sue related to other members of the community: "It had been painful to feel so profoundly alienated from the place where we had made our home. I had always chatted easily with the barista at Starbucks, and I knew the names of all the women at the supermarket checkout. After Columbine, I anxiously watched people's body language and facial micro-expressions to see whether they recognized me" (Klebold 2017, 299).

his grandfather, and he is not hatefully disposed towards Jewish people, he is nonetheless perceived as a potential enemy or a threat, given his relation to Rudolf Höss.

One might ask: is the interpersonal antagonism justified? After all, if we considered only the actions of both Sue and Rainer such antagonism would not arise. I argue that what makes the perception of the relatives as a threat permissible is their (presumed) partiality toward the wrongdoers. Typically, being someone's relative includes being partial toward them. Thus, the victims may reasonably perceive both Sue and Rainer as being supportive of or on the side of the wrongdoer.

We may distinguish between two types of partiality: practical and epistemic. First, there is *practical partiality*. We often exhibit partiality towards our loved ones, giving them preferential treatment and considering their interests more deeply. Moreover, we intuitively think that we can *justifiably* (to some extent and in certain circumstances) give preferential treatment to our near and dear. This partiality is present in familial bonds: people typically care more about the welfare and interests of their relatives than they do about the interests of strangers. It is therefore not unreasonable to expect that those related to the wrongdoer will support them to some extent.

Second, we may also distinguish epistemic partiality (Stroud 2006). People in special relationships not only support one another practically but also hold generous and positive beliefs about each other. As Stroud explains, when we gain new information about the misbehaviour of our near and dear we tend to adopt "differential epistemic practices": "we tend to devote more energy to defeating or minimizing the impact of unfavourable data than we otherwise would"; "we will go to greater lengths…to construct and to entertain alternative and less damning interpretations of the reported conduct" (Stroud 2006, 505-506). As social psychology research indicates, people are incredibly reluctant to admit that their loved ones committed a wrong or even when they admit that they try to diminish their blameworthiness (Brown, 1986; Murray 1993).[11]

[11] In legal proceedings, courts often exhibit a presumption against having relatives testify against the accused party. This practice acknowledges the emotional burdens placed on individuals testifying against their loved ones and recognizes the inherent challenge of maintaining impartiality. The expectation of impartiality in such contexts is

Sue herself acknowledges epistemic partiality towards his son. On the afternoon following the shooting, she reports:

> I was convinced Dylan could not have been responsible for taking anyone's life. I was beginning to accept he had been physically present during the shootings, but Dylan had never hurt anyone or anything in his life, and I knew in my heart he could not have killed anyone. I was wrong, of course—about that and many things. At the time, though, I was sure. (Klebold 2017, 48).

Similarly, there are many instances of epistemic partiality of children towards their Nazi parents. Rainer, in the documentary, notes that "I grew up with the understanding that my family had lived through the terrors of the Nazi occupation in the Netherlands" emphasizing the denial of other members of his family about the atrocities committed by their grandfather (Ze'evi, 2011).

The fact that, typically, we are partial toward members of our family, may give rise to a reasonable expectation on the part of the victims that in the aftermath of the wrongdoing, relatives, even when innocent, will show some kind of support or bias towards the transgressors. Thus, they may reasonably perceive them as some kind of threat.

How others perceive us may have an impact on how we relate to one another. If victims do not perceive relatives as someone who fully acknowledges the significance of the wrongdoing and correctly assigns the blame, this may justify them withholding trust or shunning from associating with innocent relatives. Reasonable expectations are part of the fabric of actual relationships that we stand in. The facts about what other people have done and how you are socially positioned towards them might affect the relation of threat you stand in.

Moreover, your obligation can be changed by facts about the social situation that you are not in control of. If you're male, you should not walk close behind a woman in a dark street. It is not unreasonable for the woman to perceive you as a threat. And it seems that the appropriate

demanding, as it requires individuals to compartmentalize their personal relationships and fulfill their role as impartial witnesses. Even though in legal context we do not expect relatives of the wrongdoer to testify against their relatives or take responsibility for their actions, in the context of social relations we may require them to take a stand.

response would be to keep your distance. Occupying the social position of a man affects how others can interpret and respond to your behaviour. Generally speaking: Men harass women in dark streets. This is a generic statement, which means that it is fault-tolerant. You being a man who does not meet the description does not falsify the description. And it seems appropriate that you will act in a way that takes into consideration how others can reasonably interpret your behaviour.

In sum, I have argued that whether we are perceived as eligible participants in moral relationships can be justifiably affected by what others do and what kind of relationship we stand to them. Others don't always have perfect evidence about ourselves and interpret our behaviour in terms of the social position we occupy. The need to address interpersonal antagonism makes intelligible the kind of responses that relatives like Sue and Rainer employ. In the next section, I will argue that taking responsibility for the wrongs done by our near and dear, can function as a way of addressing the interpersonal antagonism that we innocently entered. As I will spell out in the next section this reveals how taking responsibility for wrongs done by others functions as a way of repairing moral relationships between the innocent relatives and victims.

3.3. Taking responsibility as addressing the threat

The reparative function of taking responsibility for wrongs done by others becomes intelligible in light of the need address the interpersonal antagonism. As explained in the previous section, the metaphor of interpersonal antagonism is meant to capture the damage to moral relationships between the innocent relatives and the victims that is brought about by the actions of our relatives and the social position we occupy. As I argued, the modification in the way victims and relatives relate to one another is justified in virtue of the (presumed) partial relationship between the relatives and the transgressors. In this section, I will argue how taking responsibility by the relatives of the wrongdoers can address this damage.

Lack of response, or inadequate response on behalf of the relatives to the fact of interpersonal antagonism, may further damage our moral relationships. When my son, sister or father, wrongs someone, even though I am in no way at fault for the wrongdoing, it is inappropriate for me to relate to the victim in the same way as I did prior to the wrongdoing. Failure to acknowledge that the action was unacceptable, that the perpetrators are blameworthy for the wrong, or that victims are owed reparative response, would be a way of saying that the transgression was acceptable. The failure to respond to the wrongdoing by the relatives of the wrongdoer, just like a failure to respond appropriately to the wrongdoing by the wrongdoer, can lead to mistrust and resentment and it may add to the chronic indignation or bitterness of the victims.

How can taking responsibility for the wrongs done by others overcome the interpersonal antagonism? Before I answer this question let me provide a characterisation of what taking responsibility for wrongs done by our near and dear involves and contrast it with the paradigm case. Recall from Chapter 3 the paradigm form of taking responsibility for our own wrongdoings. In the paradigm case,

CTR. A takes responsibility for wrongdoing, if

(i) A acknowledges the nature of the wrong and the moral status of the wronged party.
(ii) A accepts responsibility for the wrong.
(iii) A recognizes the normative consequences of one's wrongdoing.
(iv) A commits to fulfilling the normative consequences.
(v) Taking of responsibility is performed.
(vi) Being performed, the act of taking responsibility communicates (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), to the wronged party.

As I argued, the point of taking responsibility, as evidenced in the paradigmatic form, is to put forward a new way of treating the wronged party that counteracts the past mistreatment. This can succeed if the wrongdoer fulfils conditions (i)-(iv) *and* communicates that to the wronged party. By taking responsibility, a wrongdoer is able to counteract the past wrongdoing without

diminishing its significance or their responsibility for the wrongdoing. In this way, taking responsibility can be a first step towards repairing moral relationships that the wrongdoing damaged.

Let me now put forward a characterisation of the non-paradigmatic form, that of taking responsibility for wrongs by others (for which we do not share responsibility):

A takes responsibility for the wrong done by *B*, if

1) A acknowledges the nature of the wrong.
2) A assigns responsibility for the wrong to B.
3) A recognizes the normative consequences B's wrongdoing generates for A.
4) A commits to fulfilling their *own* normative consequences.
5) A performs the act of taking responsibility.
6) Being performed, A communicates (1), (2), (3), (4) to the wronged parties.

Taking responsibility by Sue and Rainer is an important step to resume to normal moral relationships between them and the victims of their relatives. In many cases, it's clear that the relatives are in no way at fault for the wrongdoing. However, even if others do not perceive the relatives as at fault, there may still be a need for some affirmation of significance of the wrongdoing and the antagonistic effect it had. As I argue in this section, taking responsibility by expressing guilt-like attitudes, apologizing, making amends, taking a stand on the wrongdoer by the relatives of the perpetrator is a first step towards a renewal of normal moral relationships between them and the victims. In this case, taking responsibility performs the function of repairing moral relationships between the relatives of the wrongdoer and the wronged parties, even though the relatives were not responsible for severing those relationships.

The relatives, like someone who is actually responsible for the wrongdoing, ask for forgiveness and try to make amends, in order to acknowledge that given the wrong done by their close one's the victims are allowed to treat them as enemy – in a similar way that they view the wrongdoer. That is, they are entitled to refuse to see them as possible future friends or a person they can associate with, they may reasonably withhold trust. In other circumstances treating

someone as an enemy in this sense would be insulting, however, in the aftermath of a severe wrongdoing this is what they are allowed to do. The ritual of taking responsibility turns our to be an appropriate way of acknowledging the fact of interpersonal antagonism – at least given the lack of other forms of perform this act available.

The taking of responsibility by Sue and Rainer's can be viewed as an invitation to restore the relational possibilities that existed prior to the conflict. Similarly to taking responsibility for one's own wrongs, this invitation may be rejected. In such scenario, the involved parties revert to a state of estrangement, where they acknowledge and respect each other's rights but forgo the usual openness and connection. Even though the relatives are not at fault, the victims are permitted (though not obligated) to treat them in ways that otherwise would only be suitable for the wrongdoer. The relatives should recognize that they do not have the right to protest or respond in the manner normally available to an innocent person who has been treated in such a manner. The relative of the wrongdoer assumes a position towards the victims akin to that of a penitent towards those they have harmed, despite the absence of their own culpability.

It is crucial to note an important difference between the response of taking responsibility that is given by a perpetrator and the blameless relatives of the perpetrator. What might be expected from the perpetrator is apology that expresses a change of heart and commitment to act differently in the future. It is not clear whether this kind of apology can be issued by the blameless relatives of the wrongdoer. It is not clear what would be the content of such resolution or change of heart in the case of Sue and Rainer. Perhaps, Sue may devote her life to raising awareness about the mental health issues among the young. After all, even though she is not at fault for not being extra sensitive to the mental health issues of her son, she may think that now she should do more to prevent future massacres from occurring. However admirable, this response seems in many ways supererogatory. Unlike true repentance, the resolutions undertaken by the relatives of the wrongdoers, remain optional.

Moreover, it is also important to keep in mind that in taking responsibility for the wrongs done by their relative, Sue and Rainer cannot repair the moral relationships between the transgressors and the victims. Only taking responsibility by the transgressor can potentially repair the moral relationships between them and the victims. Taking responsibility then is a kind of non-transferable good and we value it in its particularity of origin. It is important result that my explanation can explain this intuition. It is important to emphasize that while successful episodes of taking responsibility for actions of others are feasible, their success is parasitic on the existence of a broader practice in which it is the person who is responsible for the wronging that takes responsibility.

Similarly, it is crucial to note a difference between the response of taking responsibility by the relatives of the wrongdoer and the response of the larger community. It would be inappropriate for those who are not related to the wrongdoer to seek forgiveness or offer apologies for the crime because they do not enter antagonistic relations with the victims. In fact, if a bystander were to do so, we might consider it insulting. Third parties can apportion responsibility, validate victim's account of the event and acknowledge the significance of the wrongdoing and the moral status of the victim.[12] Similarly, certain responses to the wrongdoing that would be adequate to other members of the community would not be adequate to Rainer and Sue. Third parties, it seems, may express sympathy and compassion, whereas, these kinds of responses would have to be qualified in the case of relatives of the wrongdoer.

3.4. Conclusion

[12] As Walker explains: "Third parties play a crucial role in signalling to those wronged, to wrongdoers, and to each other that an action violates norms and whether or not such an action requires a response that reasserts the norms and recognizes victims and wrongdoers as such. We are social beings who rely on others to play by shared rules that can guide our expectations. We also rely on each other to stabilize our senses of entitlement and responsibility, including our responsibilities to address and redress wrongs" (Walker 2006, 95).

To sum up. In this section I have argued that the wrongs done by their relatives thrust Sue and Rainer into an interpersonal antagonism with the victims: victims may perceive innocent relatives as a threat. Being perceived as a threat may be justified even when the relatives are not in any way at fault for the wrongdoing. The relatives occupy a particular social position - for instance, that of *a parent* and *a grandson* of the transgressors. Typically, being someone's parent or grandson involves being partial towards them. This includes not only caring more about their interests, but also a certain kind of cognitive bias towards them: thinking about them more generously, even when the evidence about their behaviour suggest to the contrary; diminishing their responsibility; or diminishing the significance of the wrongdoing. By occupying the social position of *a parent* or *a grandson*, the relatives, can reasonably be perceived as a threat. Which in turn has implications for the moral relationships between the innocent relatives of the wrongdoer and the victims.

Finally, I argued that taking responsibility for wrongs done by others may be an appropriate response to the interpersonal antagonism. In taking responsibility for wrongs done by others, we acknowledge the significance of the wrongdoing, assign responsibility to the wrongdoer, and accept the normative consequences that their action has generated for us. In this way, we can reassure the victims that we are fit to partake in moral relationships with them. Taking responsibility for wrongs done by others may thus serve as an important step in restoring the moral relationships between the victims and the innocent relatives that the wrongdoing severed.

4. Conclusion

Let me take stock. The objective of this thesis was to explain and vindicate the social practice of taking responsibility for wrongs done by our near and dear. I characterised the practice in terms of responses to the wrongdoing associated with responsibility by the relatives of the transgressor: the relatives express feelings of guilt, remorse, and regret; they offer apologies to the victims, seek forgiveness and reconciliation and perform acts of recompense. Such practice seems prima facie problematic in cases where the relatives of the wrongdoer do not share responsibility for the wrongdoing or are at fault: how do we vindicate the practice in which a person A takes responsibility for the misconduct of another person B, when A would have been considered faultless or not responsible for the misdeeds if we only considered their own conduct?

To explain and vindicate the practice of taking responsibility for wrongs done by our near and dear I offered a paradigm-based explanation of the practice. The main aim of paradigm-based explanation is to provide an account of the purpose of an internally diverse practice, as exemplified in the paradigm case of the practice. The method allows us to illuminate not only the function the practice serves in the paradigmatic form, but also we can vindicate the non-paradigmatic forms of the practice by showing that they serve the same purpose as the paradigm form.

Let me summarise my arguments. In Chapter 2, I identified the paradigm form of taking responsibility for wrongdoing – Communicated Taking of Responsibility. I have argued that in the paradigm form, taking responsibility counteracts the past mistreatment by putting forward a new of treating the wronged party. In this way, taking responsibility may serve the function of repairing moral relationships between the wrongdoer and the wronged party. Next, in Chapter 3, I argued that taking responsibility for wrongs done by others serves a similar function. In particular, it repairs the moral relationships between innocent relatives and the victims. Therefore, taking responsibility for wrongs done by others is taking responsibility proper.

5. References

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