

Ignorance: What Is So Wrong With It?
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Abstract

This thesis aims to shed light on the harmful consequences of ignorance that creates, sustains, and reifies social injustice. I argue that ignorance causes harm in social life in a vast number of ways that usually go unnoticed. In the first chapter, I discuss ignorance as a general notion and different definitions of ignorance in the literature. Then I explain why those definitions fall short of tackling the problem I am concerned about. After that, I present my own definition of ignorance: I argue that any subject P is ignorant of x iff P does not care about x . To explain my reason for appealing to care, I discuss Virginia Held's account of the ethics of care and the importance of care in social relationships. Then I review the instances of social injustices caused by care; such as gaslighting and silencing. In addition to that, I discuss the harmful effects of being ignorant of one's prejudices that contribute to sustaining existing structural injustices. In the last chapter, I discuss the relationship between ignorance, responsibility, and blame. I start by giving an overview of the relationship between causation, responsibility, and blame. Then, I present Kelly Shaver's framework for attribution of responsibility and blame. Finally, I discuss the ignorance of structural injustices by the privileged that contribute to these injustices being preserved and maintained. Using Iris Marion Young's account of political responsibility, I hold the privileged responsible and argue that their blame should not be easily mitigated.

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Introduction

I promised my mom a phone call two days ago, but I didn't call her. That happens quite a lot, but usually, I have valid excuses: I get caught up studying, and it is late, or my mind is usually so full of the things I have to do that I cannot even afford a chit-chat, or by the time I get out of the work, my mom already went to sleep. When I called her the next day, she started the conversation by complaining: "You didn't call, Ayda. I waited for your call for the whole evening!"

I knew that was coming, and my apology was already ready. I know that if it was my friends, not my mom, not keeping the promise to call wouldn't be a big deal. My friends and I, more or less, live similar lives, and they already know how things can get busy and chaotic. On the other hand, my mom cannot really contemplate what kind of a life I live, so it is harder for her to relate. That is why every time I have to tell her that it is not that I don't want to talk to her; it is about our busy lives that sometimes (usually) things don't go as you plan.

That happens from time to time. At first, she used to be even more upset. When I realized that this affects her more than anyone I know, I started to be more careful about making promises and the ways in which I make up for not keeping a promise. After some time, she saw my sincere attempt to compensate, and she became more understanding and less querulous. That is how I prefer showing how much I care about people: simply not being ignorant of how they feel and trying to change how they feel about my actions by explaining why I do what I do. And, it usually works, especially when my attentive attitude is recognized and appreciated.

This thesis will be about ignorance as an attitude that causes harmful consequences such as mistrust, submission, exploitation, and the spreading of false information. To my mind, these consequences are fundamentally caused by a very simple problem; which is, remaining simply ignorant of what is going on around you. Regarding that, in the following chapters, ignorance will be under scrutiny: I will focus on ignorance as an attitude and investigate how ignorance affects our daily interactions in a harmful way. Bluntly put, my main issue will be ignorance as an attitude of a person, regardless of being intentional or unintentional, that cripples individuals' self-image and brings about harmful consequences via basic interactions. In the first chapter, I will start by laying out the definition of ignorance that is useful for my project since it has different connotations in different contexts. The main motivation behind my project is the following: I argue that understanding ignorance can help us gain insight into social injustices that are systematically reproduced and repeated in everyday life but usually go unnoticed. The second chapter will be dedicated to understanding the connection between social injustice and ignorance. After defining and laying out the oppression caused by ignorance with a survey of the existing literature, three sections will follow. The first section will examine the connection between social injustice and ignorance. In the second section, the relationship between ignorance and responsibility will be under scrutiny. More specifically, my focus will be on two critical questions: under which circumstances should people be held accountable for their ignorant actions, and to what extent should people be taken to be culpable? In light of the literature review I make in the first chapter, I will come up with a general framework to assess which actions can be or should be seen as culpable, and which cannot. With this section, I aim to reemphasize my motivation for this project by applying my framework to real-life events to make social injustice cases more visible in everyday life.

Chapter 1

Ignorance As a Topic

The subject matter of knowledge is highly prominent. It has been under scrutiny since the Ancient Greeks and has its own area of research called epistemology. Ignorance, as a phenomenon, is fundamentally related to knowledge; etymologically, different roots are attributed to the word in the literature; nevertheless, they end up with the same meaning. The first one is the Latin word *ignarus*, which means “not knowledgeable” (Peels, 2010, p. 59); the second one is the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning the cognizer’s mind’s state when they know something, with the prefix “i-” which adds the negation (Haas and Vogt, 2022). Different from knowledge, ignorance only started attracting historians, scientists, and philosophers’ attention in recent years. Although it has been a matter of issue since Socrates, it is quite recent that it has been an issue of its own kind and is under scrutiny. John Locke, one of the prominent figures in the early modern era who wrote on ignorance, describes it as ‘the dark side of knowledge’ (Locke, 1689, p. 553-555). In time, the definition of ignorance went beyond merely being a negation of knowledge, and the subject area gained new perspectives. Ignorance branched into various categories, and those categories are named differently in disparate accounts.

1.1 Defining Ignorance

1.1.1 Propositional Ignorance

The state of being ignorant consists of two crucial components: i) a subject that is in the state of being ignorant, ii) a subject matter in which the cognizer is ignorant. Concerning that, the definition has to contain the state of mind of the cognizer and the subject matter. In addition, these two components have to be in relation: what goes wrong between the cognizer and cognizance so that ignorance comes about. This is a first gloss on the intuitive phenomenon of ignorance. In the following, I will consider some detailed philosophical proposals.

Alvin Goldman and Erik Olsson define ignorance as the “complement of knowledge” (Goldman and Olsson, 2009, p. 20), namely, either *S* knows *P* or *S* is ignorant of *P*. This is a generic definition of knowledge and is coined as the Standard View in the literature (Arfani&Magnani, 2020, p. 690). In analytical epistemology, the Standard View is challenged by the New View on ignorance, which argues that ignorance is “the lack of true beliefs” (Arfani&Magnani, 2021, p. 690). One of the prominent figures of this debate Rik Peels, after criticizing the Standard View, proposes the following definition of ignorance that hinges on one’s state of beliefs:

“Some cognitive subject *S* is ignorant of the truth value of some proposition *p* iff (i) *p* is true and *S* disbelieves *p*, *S* suspends judgment on *p*, or *S* has never considered *p*, but would disbelieve *p* or suspend judgment on *p* upon considering *p*, or (ii) *p* is false and *S* believes *p*, *S* suspends judgment on *p*, or *S* has never considered *p*, but would believe *p* or suspend judgment on *p* upon considering *p*” (Peels, 2010, p.63).

This New View on Ignorance works with propositions. So, to be able to say that subject *S* is ignorant of *p*, we need some facts. However, when it comes to social strata and the social problems that arise from them, things get a bit messier. Let me prove my point to clarify the distinction here. In the chapter “Ignorance and Racial Insensitivity,” Jose Medina (2016) discusses racial insensitivity, which is, he describes: “a kind of numbness, reflecting on the affective and cognitive

aspects of people's inability to respond to racial injustices" (Medina, 2016, p. 178). He argues that a racially insensitive person is cognitively and actively numb, and they have epistemic lacunas or distortions which they are unable to fill or fix (p. 178). He maintains that this numbness and ignorance are correlated, but not the propositional ignorance, but an active one:

"In its most insidious forms, racial insensitivity involves not just a regular kind of ignorance about racial matters, but what is called in the epistemology of race "active ignorance": the kind of ignorance that involves a whole battery of mechanisms of avoidance and resistance to know and to learn; the kind of ignorance that is deeply invested in not knowing. This kind of recalcitrant ignorance has to be distinguished from the basic or plain kind of ignorance that involves nothing more than the absence of true belief or the presence of false belief" (Medina, 2016, p. 182).

He proposes the following schema to distinguish the two:

"Basic ignorance: (1) absence of (true) belief (2) presence of false belief Active ignorance: (3) cognitive resistances (e.g., prejudices, conceptual lacunas) (4) affective resistances (e.g., apathy, interest in not knowing "the will not to believe") (5) bodily resistances (e.g., feeling anxious, agitated, red in the face) (6) defense mechanisms and strategies (deflecting challenges, shifting burden of proof, etc.)" (Medina, 2016, p. 183).

The racial insensitivity and racial injustices that Medina discusses are not things that can be captured by only appealing to propositions. Ignorance that occurs in contexts/situations that bring about harmful social and political consequences go beyond the definition of propositional ignorance. Nadja El Kassar (2018) argues that propositional ignorance lacks "epistemic agency," which is at the center, especially in the feminist epistemology and critical race theory debates (p. 303). Hence, to be able to assess normative accounts, we need more than facts and propositions since these epistemological definitions do not give the necessary formula on how to spot the injustices in social life.

1.1.2 Ignorance as a Cognitive Failure

The Standard View and the New View of ignorance take the propositions at their center and define knowledge via knowing or believing the truth/falsity of the propositions. Another way to go would be to put much more emphasis on the cognizer's state of mind. Selene Arfini defines knowledge as the following:

- "1. ignorance can be defined as a cognitive condition that can be either passively (and unconsciously) bore by an agent or actively nurtured by her;
2. the cognitive state of ignorance entails epistemic limitations (which can be any lack of knowledge, belief, information or data) that affects the behavior, the belief system, and the inferential capacity of the agent
3. describing how the human agent is in a condition of ignorance means to recognize those cognitive traits that define ignorance as a particular cognitive state and investigate how they specifically affects her cognitive capacities" (Arfini, 2019, pp. 12-13).

Arfini's definition is more focused on the cognitive agent and their cognitive capacities. However, I believe that not every ignorance has to entail an epistemic limitation. Recall the example I give about my mom and me at the beginning of the chapter. Let us assume another scenario. This time, even though I see that my mom gets sad every time I do not call her, I still do not change my behavior. Namely, I keep giving her promises even though I can foresee the possibility that I can get busy and cannot call her. When she complains about this, I apologize; but I still do not change my attitude. In this case, I am ignorant of how my action affects her and the harm I give to my mother. Probably she waits for my call the whole day. Maybe she plans the day accordingly so that when I call, she can pick up immediately, postpones some of her plans; in a couple of hours, gets sad and angry about waiting, asks herself why it is so hard to make even a short phone call. Her annoyance is understandable, and if I am not motivated enough to change my behavior, that is likely to result in poor communication between me and my mom. Nevertheless, in this case, it is obvious that my ignorance does not entail any epistemic limitations.

At this point, one can argue that by not changing my behavior, what I am ignoring is actually my mother's feelings. This ignorance entails ignorance of some epistemic truths, such as the truth that my behavior is making my mother feel sad, depressed, and angry. However, Arfini's definition still misses the mark because it focuses exclusively on epistemic limitations, whereas what I am interested in discussing is the ethical limitations. Bluntly put, what I am concerned about is not the epistemic truths, i.e., the fact that I am ignoring my mother's feelings, it is the fact that I am ignoring the harm that I give to her through ignoring her feelings and not changing my behavior. I am particularly concerned about the ethical wrong that I am causing harm and doing nothing to make up for it. It is crucial to reemphasize that the main motivation of this thesis is to discuss and investigate a subject's fundamental reasons/motivations to be ignorant of the ethical problems they are encountering in everyday life. I aim to call out the harm caused by ignorance and to understand what keeps the subjects in a state of ignorance despite the damages it generates.

1.1.3 My Definition of Ignorance

So, how can we make sense of such an ignorant attitude? If it is not epistemic limitations, then what does this cognitive state of ignorance entail? First of all, it is important to note that this is not a one-time issue; it is an attitude that I make the promise of calling to my mom and do not keep it. Secondly, I am aware of the fact that that is not a nice situation for my mom, but I still do it. So ignorant attitude is persistent. If I am not motivated enough to change my attitude, that indicates one thing: that I do not really care. I do not care whether my mom is sad because of me or not, that is why her sadness does not motivate me enough to change my attitude, and I can be ignorant of how she feels.

I define ignorance as a state that occurs when there is a lack of care. This lack of care motivates and actively nurtures ignorance such that ignorance becomes not a one-time issue, it becomes a persistent state. It becomes a persistent state due to the fact that one does not have enough motivation to make up for it. If I do not care how my mom feels about my actions or how she gets affected by them, that results in me being ignorant of them, and I do not have enough motivation to fix my attitude. Accordingly, I propose the following definition of ignorance:

Any subject P is ignorant of x iff P does not care about x.

Note that this is a generic definition and contains other forms of ignorance that do not bring any harm necessarily. For instance, I am ignorant of today's temperature in Rome because I live in Vienna and do not need to know this information. Basically, I do not care about the weather in Rome because that does not have any direct effect on my life right now, which is why I am ignorant of it. However, that type of ignorance is not my particular concern in this thesis because the fact that I am ignorant of the weather temperature in Rome does not bring any harm to anyone. What I am concerned about is the subject's ignorance of the situations that harm others. I argue that this state of ignorance entails lack of care, which is the essential condition to preserve the state of ignorance since the subject cannot find enough motivation to fix the harm caused by ignorance due to this lack of care. To sum up, I argue that:

Any subject P is ignorant of x iff P does not care about x. If P does not care about x, P does not have sufficient reasons to act on/ for the sake of x. If P does not have sufficient reasons to act on/ for the sake of x, P becomes/ chooses to remain ignorant of x.

1.2 The Ethics of Care

1.2.1 The Role of Care in Society

In this section, I will explain how exactly we should understand care in my proposed definition of ignorance. We human being live in communities, and we are born into groups. We have families, friends, colleagues, classmates, and neighbors that we share the life together. This communal living requires us to take responsibility and fulfill some tasks to create just and thriving communities. We are expected to be responsible citizens, caring friends, supportive partners, responsible parents, and loving children. Those social ties make us interdependent because our well-being depends on the relationships we form with others. Regarding that, those social ties determine a bigger portion of our well-being than is portrayed in the dominant moral theories or the liberal understanding of individuals. Virginia Held (2005) extensively portrays this problem, and she calls the reader to rethink the actual significance of ethics of care:

“Dominant moral theories tend to interpret moral problems as if they were conflicts between egoistic individual interests on the one hand and universal moral principles on the other. The extremes of “selfish individual” and “humanity” are recognized, but what lies between these is often overlooked. The ethics of care, in contrast, focuses especially on the area between these extremes. Those who conscientiously care for others are not seeking primarily to further their own individual interests; their interests are intertwined with the persons they care for. Neither are they acting for the sake of all others or humanity in general; they seek instead to preserve or promote an actual human relation between themselves and particular others. Persons in caring relations are acting for self and others together. Their characteristic stance is neither egoistic nor altruistic; these are the options in a conflictual situation, but the well-being of a caring relationship involves the cooperative well-being of those in the relationship and the well-being of the relationship itself” (p. 13).

Here, Held emphasizes the interdependent nature of human relationships and how we are related to each other through our social interactions. Regarding that, it is crucial to emphasize the invaluable importance of care in social interactions. To be able to form and sustain healthy social interactions, we essentially need care. Selma Sevenhuijsen (2003) describes care as “an ability and a willingness to ‘see’ and to ‘hear’ needs, and to take responsibility for these needs being met” (p. 83). She describes caring as an attitude that is “with attentiveness, responsibility, responsiveness and the commitment to see issues from differing perspectives” (p. 83). In our social interactions, we need this baseline attentiveness to understand what people need and how we can cover those needs. If we accept that we are interdependent beings, as Held argues, caring practices assure the well-being of the individual in relation to the well-being of the others.

1.2.2 Ignorance and Care

Then, what is the relationship between care and ignorance in this context? Referring back to the example between me and my mom, we usually have problems and conflicts in our social relations. As we saw in the two different possible scenarios regarding my attitudes, whether we handle such issues with care or ignorance makes a lot of difference. We tend to be ignorant of our duties as a flatmate, as a friend; fail to see the needs of our loved ones, and forget to pay attention to what they need. Those instances of ignorance end up causing major problems in our relationships with people. Suppose Jamie is living with four other people in a communal flat. He always postpones cleaning the kitchen after cooking because he hates cleaning. Even though his flatmates warn him about this because when they want to cook, they always have to wash Jamie’s dishes first, and that means an extra burden for them when they want to cook. After they warn Jamie, he always says he will wash them next time, but after washing them a couple of times, he again stops washing. This situation becomes very annoying for his flatmates because they are basically desperate in this case. Given that they warn him and this does not change anything, there are only a number of things they can do. Either they can warn him in a serious way and tell him that if he doesn’t change his behavior, they will kick him out of the house and find another person, which is not a nice way of solving problems; moreover, it is not a hundred percent certain that Jamie will change his behavior because he is afraid of being kicked out. Even if we assume that he changes his behavior because he is afraid, this will certainly affect the general atmosphere of the house in a negative way since he will be forced to wash the dishes. Forcing him to do something will create unpleasant tension and an unpeaceful atmosphere in the house, and it is especially unnecessary if we see how small and basic the problem is. There are a couple of reasons why they should avoid a conflict. First of all, it will be costly for the other flatmates to kick Jamie out and look for another flatmate, and it is not guaranteed that the future flatmate will be clean or a nice person. They can even turn out to be a worse person than Jamie, so the change is risky. Secondly, home is where people should feel safe and secure; it is the place where they spend a significant portion of their lives. Jamie and his flatmates will inevitably get affected by the negative atmosphere of the household. Even if Jamie and his flatmates are careless people by default, they will feel the negative tension when they bump into each other in the house or when they have to discuss something for the house, the bad feeling will always lurk in the background. This is a costly and unsustainable situation, especially regarding the fact that the times at work are usually very stressful and tiresome, and people try to stay away from stress when they are out of work.

The situation looks complicated, but in fact, it stems from a very basic type of failure: failing to care. If Jamie cared enough about the general well-being of the household, he could not be so ignorant of how his actions make his flatmates feel, and he would have the inner motivation to clean the house after cooking in the first place. Because he is ignorant of how his behaviors affect others in the communal living space, he does not have enough motivation to change his behavior.

1.2.3 Care and Society

In liberal capitalist societies, we are surrounded by people who are ignorant of what others feel and need. The liberal understanding of the individual propagates the atomic lifestyles that individuals are taken to be separate from each other in society and only care about their own interests and well-being. Held (2005) argues that ethics of care not only shows that this is false, but it is also a “distinct moral theory” which “examines social and political arrangements in the light of these values” (p. 13).

This idea that society is made up of morally and epistemologically interrelated individuals constitutes the bedrock for the ethics of care. Held (2005) argues that we tend to overlook the fact that we spend most of our lives dependent on other people (p. 10). Infants need caregivers to grow up, elderly people need caregivers to maintain their lives, and in cases like disabled people, they need permanent caregivers to maintain their lives. She argues that this dependency relationship is crucial to understand what is necessary for human beings to live and progress: “Prospects for human progress and flourishing hinge fundamentally on the care that those needing it receive, and the ethics of care stresses the moral force of the responsibility to respond to the needs of the dependent” (Held, 2005, p. 10).

This is just a mere example of how ignorance affects our lives. However, we encounter people with a mindset similar to Jamie’s in a vast number of spaces; workplaces, communal spaces, and even in our families and romantic relationships. That is why, recognizing the ethics of care as a moral theory becomes crucial here. Reducing caring to merely parenting or social work provided to people in need is a simplification and a blatant disregard for its importance in every interaction. Berenice Fisher and Joan C. Toronto (1991) define care as the following: “On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web” (p. 40). According to this definition, care is one of the conditions for a flourishing society. So care is not merely doing housework or child-rearing; it is an essential component for living together on an equal basis.

1.2.4 The Role of Care in Relationships

In any kind of relationship, if there is no mutual care from both parties, this paves the way for unequal relationship patterns. Let us think of the ignorant Jamie again, who fails to fulfill his household duties because he does not care about his flatmates. Jamie’s ignorance harms the equal share of the households, which ideally should be the case. The unequal share of the household work puts an extra burden on his flatmates, which is unfair. A similar but more prevalent problem is the ongoing gendered division of labor. Last summer my cousin got married. She is a 28-year-old woman who has been working in the logistics sector for more than six years and is pretty successful at her job. I went to visit her new house in December, and we talked about her new life and fresh marriage. She told me she likes married life, but now, she has to clean and cook, which are not the things she used to do when she was living with her mom. “I am trying new recipes every day”, she told me. “It is a bit tiring, but at least my husband likes the dishes I cook.” I was a bit confused. They are both working full-time in regular office jobs, but still, she is the only one who takes care of the household chores. “I see. Doesn’t your husband help you with cooking and cleaning?” I asked. “You are both working anyways and it must be really hard for you to take care of the housework all by yourself.” “No”, she answered. “He doesn’t know how to do housework, he has never done it.” “You have never done it as well, always your mom took care of it. You are also learning them new. Why don’t you just learn them together and divide the housework?” “He doesn’t like it.”, she replied. “He puts his dishes in the dishwasher after eating, and he sometimes vacuums the house, that’s enough for me.”

I remember this conversation left me in awe. I just could not understand why my cousin takes

on all the household responsibilities by herself, especially regarding the fact that she and Kevin¹ both work full-time jobs. Obviously, gender stereotypes are still at play in this marriage, and Kevin is okay with the idea that his wife takes care of all the house chores. However, this is an unequal and unsustainable relationship. In this marriage, Kevin is ignorant of the fact that his wife doing all the housework is unfair treatment to her. In the time remaining from work, while he is free to do what he likes, his wife has to take care of the housework, and he is ignorant of the fact that that is a tedious burden on her that prevents her from flourishing². Because he ignores the fact that this is an unequal treatment to his wife and that his wife will suffer from this in the long run, he does not attempt to change this and share the house chores equally with her.

This is not a problem that only concerns my geography and my society. It is a problem of equal opportunity. Still, in modern societies, most of the household and child-rearing work is taken up by women (European Institute of Gender Equality, 2022), which becomes a hindrance for women to fully engage in paid work and pursue their own careers. Due to the high amount of household and childcare chores, women either choose to work at part-time jobs or become housewives, which makes them economically semi- or fully dependent on their husbands. Because of the unequal division of household work, women have to commit much more time and energy to childcare and housework, which, in the end, results in women being less advantageous in the job market, and the competition becomes unfair. Furthermore, the gendered division of labor causes discrimination in the job market. Coined as the “motherhood penalty” in the literature, women who are engaged in parenting are being discriminated against due to several prejudices: they are seen as less committed to their work than their male peers, hence offered lower positions or fewer promotions, although they are as qualified as the other male candidates. Another case is that the employers hire or promote more male workers instead of female workers regarding the chance that the woman employee can have a child and would not return to work after giving birth (Ammerman I& Groysberg, 2022).

In my cousin’s case, it is for sure that being burdened with all the housework will be a hindrance to her enjoying her time freely or committing her time to things that she wants/enjoys. If they shared the house chores together, she could use her remaining extra time to do better things for herself: maybe improving her English, as she always tells me that is one of the most important goals in her life, or have a new hobby, or have more time to meet friends and family which she enjoys a lot. In a marriage, while the husband can enjoy such things, the wife takes care of the tedious work by herself is very common. Probably it will get even worse if they decide to have children because regarding this division, most likely the childcare also will be mostly taken up by the woman in this marriage.

What is the reason that keeps Kevin so ignorant of the fact that his wife also should be able to spend her free time on whatever she likes instead of committing herself fully to taking care of the house? As I stated in my definition of ignorance, the underlying reason here is that he does not care whether his wife can enjoy life as much as he does, he does not care whether they are sharing this life on equal terms. This sounds especially counter-intuitive regarding the fact that they are life partners, and ideally, he should care about his wife’s flourishing. However, he cares about his advantageous position and having his comfortable life more than his wife’s flourishing; that is why it is in his interest to hold on to the established gender roles and burden his wife with all the housework. In his value paradigm, his life comfort and own time are more valuable than his wife’s happiness or having opportunities for flourishing.

¹My cousin and her husband are Turkish, but I changed his name due to confidentiality reasons and to be able to directly refer to them instead of always writing “the husband”.

²Here, I use the word “flourishing” not fully in the Aristotelian sense, I use in the sense that one can enjoy the opportunities and capacity of realizing oneself in the fullest term.

Chapter 2

Ignorance and Social Injustice

2.1 The Discussion of Injustices Caused by Ignorance

This unequal relationship is not a problem special to my cousin's marriage. As I explained, it is a problem of gender inequality, and we still sustain such unequal relationship patterns in our society. Ignorance is not only a concern of social relationships in the private sphere; it also generates and sustains systematic injustices in the public sphere. This is a crucial issue to understand what kind of problems the attitude of ignorance paves the way and to be able to come up with solutions for these problems. I argue that understanding the underlying reasons for ignorance can help us to come up with solutions that can diminish the harms of ignorance. On the topic of ignorance and injustice, the general idea is that the epistemologies of ignorance usually involve a kind of misrecognition or non-recognition of individuals (Mikkola, 2023, p. 1). Miranda Fricker's idea of epistemic and testimonial injustice discusses particularly this problem. Fricker (2007) argues that negative stereotypes and prejudices lessen the credibility of the agent such that the agent is not recognized as a knower or their testimony is not taken seriously (p. 15). Besides the most well-known cases of testimonial injustice, on the incidents of sexual harassment, where women's testimonies tend to be approached skeptically and discounted by people in positions of power, Matthew Congdon discusses an example of a female professor. This professor, from the anonymous course evaluation platform, receives various sexist comments, including a comment that evaluates her teaching style as "emoting" (Congdon, 2017, p. 250). Congdon argues that this is not only undermining of years of work she put in to gain this title and the accumulation of knowledge she possesses but also this hard work and her expertise in her field are obviously not recognized by the commenter. This is, according to Congdon, both epistemic disesteem and epistemic disrespect due to the fact that the knower's expertise hinges not on their own effort and work but solely on the group they belong to, namely the characteristics and the stereotypical elements that the group carries.

2.1.1 Ignorance as a Lack of Recognition

Congdon notes that such examples are not mere thought experiments, in fact, they are highly commonplace. Besides the detrimental effects on the knower's social position, such attitudes impair the self-image of the knowers (Congdon, 2017, p. 246). The systematic non-recognition of the agent damages the agent's self-respect and dignity and harms them by depriving them of social validation. Congdon argues that social validation is essential for a person to develop a relationship with themselves to regard themselves as a knower; hence, without it, the person also suspects their own judgment and judgmental mechanisms (Congdon, 2017, p. 249). This phenomenon is coined "gaslighting" in the literature.

Gaslighting not only harms the psychology of the speaker on an individual level, but it also creates a distrust of the testimony of the speaker on a collective level. Since the speaker is seen as intellectually inferior, the gaslighter positions themselves as superior, which creates a power hierarchy and systemically functions through domination and subordination. Alessandra Tanesini (2016) argues that such oppressive behaviors in social relations affect and shape both parties' characters: the group in power becomes haughty and arrogant; on the other hand, the group who is being oppressed develops the intellectual vice of timidity and servility (p. 87). The coercive

behaviors of the powerful party use this position to systematically silence the speaker with struggle and frustration. After all, when one experiences frustration regularly, the less costly option for them will be to remain silent rather than actively trying to fight back against the oppressive party. This is called silencing, which can be seen as a continuum of gaslighting practices. Tanesini (2016) argues that if the speaker's assertion of their testimony is not recognized by the hearer, they end up being silenced (p. 87). Not engaging with the speaker's testimony or failing to evaluate the accountability of the speaker is the deliberate wrongdoing of the hearer; hence, for healthy communication, a type of recognition is necessary. This lack of recognition is regarded as ignorance by Tanesini (2016, p. 86), which, in the end, creates and sustains an unjust relationship between the two parties.

2.1.2 Being Ignorant of Your Own Ignorance

The last type of injustice I will discuss in my thesis in relation to ignorance is being ignorant of your own prejudices. Imagine a man, John, going to his work on a regular day. At the metro station, he sees a homeless person with dirty clothes, who apparently lives and sleeps there, and begs for money and food. He thinks to himself, "What a filthy creature!", gives a grimace of disgust and passes by the homeless person. This is a very rife approach to people such as beggars, homeless people, refugees, etc., in society. Even though the homeless person is as human as John is, what makes him see the homeless person as a filthy creature, like an animal, inferior to himself; moreover, unable to understand and empathize with his situation?

Leyens et al. (2000) argue that humans perceive the social world based on groups and categories (p. 186). Fundamentally, this works with in-group/out-group mechanisms; i.e. there are two main groups on the cognitive level: the group one belongs to and the others. Accordingly, one holds different biases for their own group and others; namely, they tend to attribute human essences to their in-group members and lower or less human essences to out-group members (p. 187). Bearing this in mind, we can interpret John's immediate reaction as an extension of that mechanism, namely, what John saw, when he looked at the beggar, is an outgroup member that doesn't belong to the same social class as him. As we can see, such perceptions based on race, gender, class, community, etc., generate a hierarchical structure that affects the judgment of the perceiver. If, as argued by Leyens et al., this is an innate mechanism that human beings have and inevitably affects our perception and cognition, there is not much to do but to be aware of it and take precautions against it. Consider the hiring processes of big companies. Such companies have big HR departments, and one of the duties of these departments is to make sure that the person that is hired is qualified enough for the position. Ideally, they make the selection based on qualifications and not on kinship with the CEO of the company. This can be seen as a mechanism that aims at preventing the in-group/out-group biases; nevertheless, it can still be, and usually is, the case that the people that work at the HR department have their personal biases and they can believe that particular jobs and tasks are done better by a particular group of people, and this can affect their decisions when selecting the best candidate for the position. A suitable example of such a case is Jordan Peterson's arguments on the pay gap. Peterson, as a professor of psychology and clinical psychologist, argues that men and women have innately different personality traits (Channel 4 News, 2018). He claims that from the evolutionary perspective, it is a fact that women, in general, tend to be more agreeable, whereas men tend to be more competitive (Peterson, 2018, p. 554). He further argues that human beings have a particular way of dividing the labor as a consequence of this evolutionary mechanism, which is why as a matter of fact, women are more attracted to care-giving jobs like nursing, teaching on the other hand, men are much more attracted to jobs that require rationality like engineering. After all, Peterson has a title and claims to ground his arguments on scientific research. If an HR person buys this discourse, they can be easily convinced that men will be better at jobs that demand competition and ambition. On the other hand, they can believe that because of their easygoing dispositions, women will be more successful at humble jobs and can select candidates accordingly.

This argument is problematic for many reasons. Anca Gheaus (2012) argues that the social world we live in is highly gendered, and we have gender norms that function as the hidden rules of society, determining our lives by shaping what we like, how to express our emotions, what to choose as a profession, our ambitions, what we find beautiful or desirable, etc. (p. 10) The lifestyles that correspond to the gendered norms of society, Gheaus calls them "gendered lifestyles" (Gheaus, 2012, p. 10). According to her argument, gender norms cause pressure on individuals in

terms of societal expectations; namely, society expects individuals to behave in line with their sex categories, and individuals internalize those norms through upbringing, education, and culture (p. 10). Thus, a loop occurs: Women and men are expected to behave in accordance with the gender norms, and gender norms are reified in society because women and men are conforming to them. Regarding that, men and women usually, consciously or unconsciously, conform to gender norms because this is less costly for them (p. 7). Gheaus finds it problematic to conform to gender norms because gender norms create systemic injustices, and it is unjust for some people to be worse off because of their sex (p. 5). Suppose Lucy is a competent graduate student who wants to work as an engineer, and she makes job applications. Say she submits her application to an HR person who conforms to the gender norms, the chances are the position she applies for will be given to a male engineer rather than Lucy, although she is as qualified and competent as the other candidates for the position. Even if she is more qualified than the others or the best-qualified candidate, her gender will be a hindrance to getting the job. Gheaus argues that even though men are, in most cases, systematically better off than women, there are valuable elements both in feminine and masculine lifestyle sets. Hence, restricting men with masculine lifestyles and women with feminine lifestyles prohibits the individuals' freedom of choice and prevents them from benefiting from the valuable elements in the other's set. She claims that, in the end, restricting people's freedom of choice is problematic on its own since having the freedom to choose has an intrinsic value that comes from autonomy and agency.

2.1.3 Ignorance and Recognition

This is not a special issue for gender. That line of thinking can be adapted to racial or other stereotypical attitudes that make a group of people worse off in society and generates systematic injustices. That is why, being aware of one's own biases and prejudices has crucial importance at this point since such prejudices and biases have a significant influence on our perception of others if not fully shape it. Different from the general consensus in the literature, Mari Mikkola (2023) argues that ignorance does not stem from misrecognition or non-recognition, it exactly stems from a specific type of recognition: the recognition i) fundamentally based upon the in-group/out-group distinction, ii) that is primordially stripped away from any kind of value attribution (p. 14). This sort of recognition sees the other as fundamentally valueless; furthermore, it reinforces and rationalizes itself in the social system on why the other should be seen as valueless, like John's gaze at the homeless person. Mikkola argues that this type of ignorance that stems from recognition is "a cognitive hindrance that works on the levels of perception, conception, memory, testimony, and motivational group interest. All of these cognitive processes are involved in socially authored and socially read action, which in white dominant and racist societies end up being problematically racialised" (Mikkola, 2023, p. 13). As a remedy, Mikkola suggests self-reflection; namely, being aware of our own biases and prejudices that pave the way for injustices (p. 15). She argues that self-recognition can enable us to work on them to correct the malice of ignorance.

Mikkola's account is similar to what I argue but in a different way. Mikkola argues that recognizing people as outgroups brings about a dehumanizing gaze that causes a lack of value and respect for that group (Mikkola, 2023, p. 14). She maintains that especially for certain groups, i.e. dominated and subordinated because of their race, and skin color, there seems to be a lack of value by default. In other words, under this gaze, certain groups of people are taken to be not worth of any value, or simply valueless per se because of their racial characteristics. This results in ignorance that operates on cognition; namely, failing to acknowledge others as individual subjects. Note that Mikkola's account of ignorance that is caused by recognition suggests that ignorance is the end result of taking a stigmatized group as valueless, which means that the lack of value attribution ends up causing ignorance. The notions of value and care seem to be correlated; we care about the things that are valuable to us and do not care about the things we see as valueless. Consider a pianist who has to choose between starting a family and releasing a new album. If success in her career is more valuable for her, she will choose to release the album, whereas if she finds having a family valuable, then she will choose to start a family over another big career move. Thus, the things we care about are determined by the things we value, and this becomes the inner motivation for any actions we take. That is why my account and Mikkola's are compatible regarding the fundamental connection between value and care. However, Mikkola's account focuses specifically on the stigmatized others and does not give an account of the ignorance that occurs between in-group members, which is why it falls short of explicating the problem that this thesis

deals with.

Those three issues; namely gaslighting, silencing, and being ignorant of your own prejudices are the concerns that are associated with ignorance in the literature. In this chapter, I clarified what is so problematic about being ignorant by demonstrating the harmful consequences of ignorant attitudes first in private relationships and then on a broader social level. In the following chapter, I will be looking at the relationship between ignorance, responsibility, and blameworthiness.

What will be at stake in my thesis is the ignorance that brings about harmful consequences such that the culprit does not pay attention to recognize the harm or is not attentive enough to see the damage they cause. Hence, they do not realize they cause harm and take responsibility for their actions. For my project, especially this type of ignorance is worth paying attention to because I would like to highlight the social injustice that ignorance brings about.

Chapter 3

Ignorance, Responsibility, and Blameworthiness

3.1 Causation, Responsibility, and Blameworthiness

So far, I have defined ignorance which will be useful for my purpose of exposing the social injustice it causes in society. Then the following issue should be, to my mind, how we should understand this injustice. For this aim, I would like to discuss two important issues regarding ignorance; which are, responsibility and blame. In this chapter, I would like to investigate the notions of responsibility and blameworthiness and why they are related to ignorance. As I showed in the first chapter, ignorance causes injustice in society; both in the private and collective spheres. Such a harmful attitude needs, firstly, recognition; and secondly, more attention so that it can be seen as a problem and tackled accordingly. First of all, I would like to discuss the relationship between responsibility and blame and how we should understand them. Let us say that Jenny is a doctor at a hospital. One day they bring an emergency patient who is having a seizure, and she needs an emergency intervention to take it under control before it leaves irreversible damage in the brain. Jenny first checks the patient, checks all available medical records, and follows the regular procedure of injecting epinephrine into the patient as an immediate remedy. However, it turns out that the patient has an allergic reaction to epinephrine, and in an hour, she dies. In this case, the question is: Is Jenny responsible and/or blameworthy for the patient's death?

This is a clear case of moral bad luck where the agent has not full control over the consequence. Certainly, there is a causal relation between Jenny's medical treatment and the death of the patient since the patient dies after Jenny's method of treatment. However, not every causality entails responsibility because usually for responsibility or blame attribution a form of human agency is necessary. For instance, in the case of natural disasters, we do not hold the avalanche responsible for killing the skiers or the earthquake for killing the inhabitants; instead, we say the avalanche or the earthquake "caused" the death of those people. Since we do not hold natural disasters responsible, we do not attribute blame to them, because it is clear that there is no intention of murder in these instances. Shaver's theory of attribution of blame is useful to assess this case (Shaver&Drown, 1986, p. 701). Shaver, in her theory, gives us a scale with three fixed points to assess such cases. These fixed points are causation, responsibility, and blame. Shaver argues that causation is the precondition of any occurrence of an event that involves human agency (Shaver&Drown, 1986, p. 701). The cause is independent of the consequence; it is only the "sufficient cause" of the occurrence. In the same line with the Humean view of causation, she argues that cause is only the antecedent of the event. On the other hand, responsibility has a direct relationship with the consequence of the event. That is why whether a person is responsible or not is a matter of judgment. This judgment is done by taking several aspects into account: i) the causal contribution of the doer to the consequence, ii) the awareness level of the doer when doing the action, iii) the intention when doing the action, iv) the degree of free will when doing the action, iv) accepting the moral guilt of the action (Shaver&Drown, 1986, p. 701). Lastly, blame is the judgment in which the perceiver evaluates these several aspects and disagrees with the doer on the validity of the justification or excuse of the action. Say I commit a crime according to the law, and I justify myself by saying that I did not know that it was a crime according to the law, or I commit a crime and say that I was drunk when I was doing it. Note that, according to Shaver's account, the

disagreement with the doer's justification is decisive for the blame attribution. If the perceiver is convinced by the justification, then this will be no longer a case of blaming. Instead, the doer can be held responsible for the incident.

Let us assess Jenny's case using this framework. Jenny was the one who gave the medication to the patient, and she was the one who made the decision. Hence, she is the cause of the death, this is the causal contribution part. However, we know that she acted on the best possible solution at the moment one can possibly have. The possibility of saving her was obviously higher than killing her with the epinephrine, so this would be the awareness of the possible consequence of the action part. Jenny gave the medication with the aim of treating the patient. Even though the medication showed a reverse effect, in the end, the expectation was that it would function as a remedy. This would be the intention section. Regarding the last part, it is obvious that she was not under external coercion when giving the medication. In Jenny's case, she had to intervene in the situation as quickly as possible, and she used the best solution at hand, which usually works on a regular patient.

3.1.1 Distinguishing Responsibility and Blame

After taking those aspects into account, Shaver tells us how to make a distinction between responsibility and blame:

"To the extent that the victim's negligence might have contributed to the outcome, the victim can accept a degree of responsibility (probably more likely in the case of a crime than in the case of a medical problem). True blame, however, is reserved for those whose intentional actions bring about harm, provided that there is no satisfactory excuse or justification (cf. Austin, 1961) for the actions taken. Thus, according to the theory, a victim may have participated in causing his or her suffering, and may bear some responsibility for that negligence. It is not possible for a victim to be objectively blameworthy for the occurrence of a crime or an illness, unless the victim intentionally behaved in a manner to produce the suffering" (Shaver&Drown, 1986, p. 701).

Shaver's emphasis on satisfactory excuse or justification is worth discussing further because the judgment of blameworthiness depends on this evaluation. Shaver (1985) discusses two forms of justifications; namely, arguing that i) the description of the doer's action is wrong and what is at stake in terms of the moral action, ii) the single act is blamable, yet it serves for a better purpose which has a broader positive impact in society (p. 163). Alternatively, the doer can choose to give an excuse for their action instead of a justification. Shaver, not exhaustively, proposes three types of excuses here: i) denial of performing the action they were accused of, ii) minimizing the causal role in the result of the event, iii) denial of intention (p. 163). Furthermore, one can question the purpose of distinguishing between responsibility and blame at this point if they both involve human agency. According to Shaver, the nature of giving an excuse underlies the necessity of this distinction:

"Excuses are offered only after an accusation has been made, an accusation that by its very nature presumes a prior judgment of moral responsibility. People do not offer excuses for their morally reprehensible actions at the very same time those actions are being performed. Rather the time sequence is action, judgment, accusation, excuse. Once the excuse has been offered, if it is accepted the perceiver's initial judgment of responsibility will be adjusted downward at the same time that the judgment of minimal blameworthiness is made" (Shaver, 1985, p. 163).

As seen here, responsibility and blame usually come apart.

3.1.2 Ignorance and Blame

Let me start with Jenny's case. Jenny, as a doctor, acted on the best option at hand. She assessed the situation and acted in accordance with her duties as a doctor. Even though the patient died in the end, which is a horrible consequence, she can argue that she checked all the medical records as a precaution, which is suitable to be a valid excuse. Hence, regarding Shaver's framework, Jenny is responsible for her action since she does not have a justification to claim that she is not responsible. The death of the patient is the result of her treatment and that is a sufficient reason to ascribe responsibility for her. Nevertheless, she is not culpable because of her valid excuse.

It is crucial to realize that Jenny's case is an example of propositional ignorance; namely, S does not know that p. However, what this thesis is concerned with is the ignorance that causes injustice in society. Regarding that, first, I will briefly discuss the situations people should taken to be responsible and/or blameworthy for their ignorance. Then I will focus on the unjust situations caused by ignorance and argue whether the ignorant is responsible or blameworthy. Remember Medina's distinction between passive and active ignorance that I discussed in the earlier section. Medina's distinction is crucial since it puts the emphasis on human agency and holds the doer responsible for their ignorance. Generally, social injustices are sustained and cultivated not because of specific malicious intentions of the people or their particular aim to preserve this injustice; but because such injustices go unnoticed, and people do not realize or refuse to acknowledge that such a situation is unjust. For blame attribution, these two cases should be distinguished and handled separately.

Contrary of my argument, El Kassar (2018) argues that an integration of both definitions is necessary to be able to assess the responsibility and culpability of ignorance (p. 306). She points out the necessity of the propositional component by flagging the notion of the epistemic agent. Accordingly, she suggests the following definition of ignorance: "Ignorance is a disposition of an epistemic agent that manifests itself in her beliefs – either she has no belief about p or a false belief – and her epistemic attitudes (doxastic attitudes, epistemic virtues, epistemic vices) (El Kassar, 2018, p. 306). She argues that her definition is the ideal version due to its emphasis on the epistemic agent; namely, the agent's attitude and motivation come into play and crucially determine whether the agent is culpable or not.

To prove her point, she gives an example of three people, Hannah, Kate, and Monica, and their reactions to a fact that they were ignorant of. Hannah and Kate are ignorant of the fact that cruise ships are bad for the environment due to high emissions of carbon and sulfur dioxides, and they book a cruise ship holiday. Monika tells them she has seen a documentary on cruise ships lately and explains how bad they are for the environment. Hannah stops Monika in the middle of her sentence and says she does not want to hear more about the documentary because she believes it will spoil the fun of the cruise trip. On the contrary, Kate gets more interested and wants to learn more about this documentary.

El Kassar argues that, in this example, Hannah was deeply ignorant and closed-minded whereas Kate was deeply ignorant and open-minded (p. 307). Following her argument, one can easily argue that Kate is not blameable because she was curious and wanted to learn more to decide her further actions. From that perspective, this can serve as a valid excuse to mitigate the blame for her ignorance; compared to Hannah who reacts differently than Kate and chooses to remain fully ignorant. To my mind, this definition fails to capture a crucial aspect of ignorance, namely, being ignorant of one's own ignorance. This open-minded-close-minded distinction points out the agent's motivation to stay ignorant or not; however, the more prevalent problem regarding ignorance is not the agent's persistence in staying ignorant but being ignorant of what is going on in their surroundings or the problems of their society in the first place, and that should not be so easily mitigated. In the following, I will explain in detail what sort of problems this approach possibly poses.

3.1.3 Ignoring Structural Injustices

Imagine Fred, a white young American, who was born and raised in Phoenix. He was born into a wealthy family, so his family sent him to the best private schools in town to make him receive the best education. After graduating from business school, Fred starts his own start-up in the marketing sector. In order to make some market research for his start-up, he goes to a neighborhood in Phoenix where the Native Americans constitute the major part of the population. Since he wants to analyze the market demand for his start-up, he plans to interact with as many people as possible that are different from each other. He is good at small talk and has a charm coming from his charisma and confidence such that he can start and develop conversations fast and effortlessly. In this neighborhood, he meets people and asks them questions to evaluate the market demand. Then he meets Michael and soon finds out that Michael knows more or less every household in the neighborhood and has good relationships with the locals. He is a person loved by the people and has good connections. Fred sees this as an excellent opportunity to grasp the general expectations of the market in this neighborhood and invites Michael for a beer. He aims to become friends with Michael and ask him questions about the people, so he wants a leave a

friendly impression on him. After a couple of beers, he starts making jokes, and he calls Michael “red skin,” something he always hears in rap songs and finds cool. He thinks that will enhance the friendly atmosphere. However, Michael reacts to this in a way that could not have crossed his mind: he says he is offended by this joke and feels insulted. He gets angry and leaves the bar. Fred gets utterly shocked by this situation and cannot make any sense of it. The next day he goes to the office and tells this story to one of his close colleagues. His colleague tells him that Michael’s reaction is very normal because in the Native American community being called red skin is something very demeaning and insulting, and one should strictly avoid doing such a thing. “I had no idea,” replies Fred to his colleague. “I had no idea that this word has such a bad connotation.”

In this example, it is obvious that Fred is ignorant of the actual connotation of the word “red skin”. Fred confronts the fact that what he did was wrong but tries to excuse his racist act by appealing to his ignorance, namely, to the fact that he did not know about this. It is important to note that Fred is ignorant of the negative connotation of the word because of his privileged position and the community he belongs to. Probably he has never had Native American friends or not encountered many people from this community even though they live in the same community. As a consequence, he became ignorant of the cultural taboos and stigmas regarding the marginalized groups in his community. However, the cultural significance of this word was not a hidden fact; on the contrary, there are remarkable public campaigns held against using racial slurs in the U.S. Some examples would be the New York City ban on using racial slurs or the National Football League’s “zero policy” which authorizes referees to penalize players if they hear the word n-word in the football field.

One can find this ignorance not culpable by arguing that people cannot and do not need to know all the epistemic sensitivities in their community. There is a limit to the knowledge we can possess, and due to time and energy constraints, one cannot be attentive to every cultural stigma and problem the groups face in their own community. To decide whether he is blamable or not, one can adopt the definition of El Kassar and draw attention to i) the state of ignorance of the ignorant agent; namely, is Fred willing to learn more about his ignorance or does he not want to know more about this, and ii) his epistemic attitudes, namely, how he processes this knowledge and whether he changes anything in his future attitude or not. Hence, drawing from El Kassar’s argument what one is blameworthy for is not ignorance by itself, it also includes the following response to this ignorance i.e. response to learning of one’s ignorance.

3.1.4 Ignorance of the Privileged

Let me start with the first argument. If the argument here is that one does not need to know all the epistemic sensitivities, how do we choose which epistemic sensitivities we need to know? We do not choose them deliberately, but they come to our attention, we are exposed to them from different channels. Surely, this depends on the people we encounter in our community and our daily interactions. And yet, it is highly critical to highlight some of the problems of this randomness and how it actually operates as a mechanism that reifies the systemic injustices in society. Let me go back to the example of my cousin’s marriage. Kevin does not offer to share the house chores with my cousin, not because he is an evil husband and wants to torture my cousin. Kevin was born in this system where well-established gender roles determine the responsibilities and duties of individuals. Accordingly, he sees himself as the breadwinner of the house, as in traditional marriages, and he thinks that his wife has to shoulder the responsibilities of the household. That is the pattern he is used to and does not see any necessity to question the fairness of this division of responsibility. As a man, he enjoys many privileges in this system, and having less work to do is only one of the advantages he has. However, I also showed that this is a hindrance for my cousin to fully exercise her capacities, and this affects her life chances, the quality of her life, her social relationships, her mental health, and so on. Kevin, by accepting these roles, sustains the structural injustice that he was born into. As a privileged person, he contributes to this unjust system, which is what Charles Mills (2007) calls the white epistemologies of ignorance. Mills argues that specifically, this type of ignorance is what made European colonialism prevail for centuries (p. 27). It is not necessarily conscious, but definitely motivated by the desire to sustain the privileges as the superior group, that refuses to activate reasoning mechanisms and counter-evidence. Hence, Mills describes white ignorance as “*an ignorance that resists . . . an ignorance that fights back . . . an ignorance that is active, dynamic, that refuses to go quietly*” (Mills, 2007, p. 13; emphasis

as in original). Clarissa Rile Hayward (2017) argues that this type of ignorance should be strictly distinguished from the basic ignorance that stems from the limited capacity of human knowledge or the limits of time, energy, and attention (p. 404). She explains the fundamental difference as follows:

“But the forms of ignorance at issue here are different. They attach specifically to positions of social dominance. (Thus, there is a male ignorance, as well, an able-bodied ignorance, a cisgendered ignorance, etc.) The mechanisms of their production include information gate-keeping by powerfully positioned members of dominant groups, dominant background beliefs and assumptions, which many individuals, especially (but not only) members of dominant groups internalize, and the psychological investment that privileged people have in maintaining a sense of the self as ethical, even as they enjoy systematic unearned advantage” (Hayward, 2017, p. 404).

Kevin enjoys his position as a privileged person and refuses to pay attention to the ongoing injustice. Let me assess his responsibility and ignorance. Kevin is being ignorant of the fact that burdening her wife with all the responsibility of the household is unfair and is a significant hindrance to her flourishing. A possible objection to this could be that Kevin does not care about his wife’s flourishing because he is ignorant of the relevant ethical truths, i.e., he and his wife are equal in sharing the responsibilities; hence both are responsible for the engagement of the domestic work. So, this should be approached as propositional ignorance. First of all, even if this is a type of propositional ignorance, it is still a form of active ignorance as Medina discussed that involves a whole battery of mechanisms that function as a hindrance to knowing and learning the necessary and relevant ethical truths (Medina, 2016, p. 182). Recall that this ignorance is deeply invested in not knowing and learning, so it is not as “innocent” as merely not knowing the weather in Vienna yesterday. Regarding the ongoing feminist movement that started in the 60s and 70s, which aims at raising awareness against the unequal division of labor and the necessity of equality in partnership, one is exposed to alternative narratives that can make them question the beliefs they formed/ adapted from the community they were born into. Bearing this in mind, Kevin and people like Kevin, regardless of their background beliefs and assumptions, should be able to call them into question. If he does not question his beliefs despite knowing the existence of other ideas that are in conflict with his ideas, then he is responsible and blamable for his ignorance. I will soon explain this argument further.

3.1.5 Active Ignorance and Blameworthiness

Before that, let me assess his ignorance using Shaver’s framework. Kevin is responsible for his ignorance because he chooses to remain ignorant of this injustice, so his agency is actively involved in this case. His justification can be with an alternative narrative of the situation, claiming that he is the breadwinner of the house, which is why the housework should be his wife’s responsibility. However, we know that this argument is outdated since, nowadays, women also pursue a career and have an active working life, different than the past order where the man was the breadwinner of the house while the woman was responsible for household chores and child-rearing. Hence, this is an invalid justification. Alternatively, Kevin can give the excuse that he did not intend to prevent the flourishing of his wife on purpose, that was not his intention, and he did not know that his stance would cause that. However, as I argued above, he could have known them. His ignorance is an active one that is sustained despite the contrary evidence of his beliefs. That is why he should be blamable for his ignorance.

At this point, one can ask how this account of active ignorance relates back to my definition of ignorance and its relation to care. After all, when discussing blame and responsibility, I argued that the ignorant agent refuses to acknowledge the injustice and see the pieces of evidence consciously or unconsciously. My account of care is doing the explanatory work of proving that the underlying reason for Kevin’s ignorance is fundamentally related to what he cares more about in his life. If Kevin wants to preserve his privileges and keep enjoying his advantages at his superior position, that shows that his own interests are more valuable to him than how his wife feels in the marriage and whether she can enjoy the benefits as much as him. If this is what he prioritizes in his life, he does not have enough reasons to acknowledge the injustice and change it, because it will not be to his benefit. As long as his individual interest is what he values the most and as long as he can keep it, he can remain ignorant of the wrongness of it because keeping his advantages is more valuable for him than having a just marriage.

The damage that Kevin causes is a direct one that directly harms another individual, and the ignorant person refuses to see it. Let us go back to the example of Fred. In this case, Fred is another ignorant agent but does not directly harm any individual/group; he is ignorant of the cultural stigmas of his society. It is again worth mentioning that these cultural stigmas harm the people in the society, marginalize them, and the social structure they live in determines their lifestyles and possible opportunities in life. This is the most crucial point worth recalling since such conditions shape and determine the lives of individuals. If these social structures are not disrupted but preserved, this will lead to more and more people suffering from social injustices and struggle throughout their lives. And yet, if such unjust systems are not disrupted or dismantled, these unjust systems keep prevailing in society.

3.1.6 The Political Responsibility of the Privileged

Let me explain this point better since this is crucial to understand the extent of the consequences of ignorance. Iris Marion Young (2011) argues that privileged people are politically responsible to act to change structural injustices that deprive a group of people of the chance to exercise their capacities fully (p. 93). Young, similar to Held's argument on the ethics of care, argues that the members of society are interrelated, which creates an interdependency between the individuals in terms of interests and opportunities (p. 70). Drawing from Rawls, she argues that social benefits appear from the social coordination and cooperation in society, which makes individuals responsible to one another (pp. 65-74). Provided that those benefits and privileges are gained through unjust social structures and institutions, even if one cannot change the past and change the chain of events that makes someone privileged, the privileged is responsible for questioning this social order and contributing to changing this structure (p. 73). In Hayward's (2017) words: "...if people participate in practices governed by institutions and other structures that are unjust, even if they cannot control or directly manipulate those background conditions, they can and should normatively evaluate them, analyze how they share responsibility with others for shaping and reshaping them, and act together with those others to change the relevant structures in justice-promoting ways" (p. 398). Hence, Young argues that the privileged are responsible to disrupt structural injustices because they owe this to the society which made them enjoy the social privileges they have possessed so far. For Young, this is an obligation derived from the social reciprocity of society (p. 105).

Let me connect everything together. I defined ignorance as a lack of care and argued that ignorance causes injustice in society through different social practices. Then, I discussed some of those practices in detail. I explained the necessity of caring relationships through ethics of care and argued that not engaging with others with a caring attitude causes perpetuating social injustices which prevent some groups enjoy life benefits and chances as much as others who are privileged. Then I discussed blame and responsibility, and regarding ignorance, I claimed that the privileged who remain ignorant of the structural injustices are, in fact, responsible to dismantle those systems. And basically the excuse "I didn't know" does not work because in these cases, ignorance does not stem from not knowing, it stems from not caring. It is not propositional, it is active. Hence, Fred is responsible and blameable for his ignorance, and his lack of knowledge does not work as a valid excuse.

3.1.7 Blame and Confrontation

I would like to propose one last point before finishing. Blame can be a powerful tool that urges the guilty to call what they have done into question. To be able to defend themselves, the guilty has to review what they have done and come up with a reasonable explanation. Regarding this function of blame, I maintain that the blame should not be easily mitigated depending on the response of learning your ignorance as El Kassar argued. "I did not know, but I will do better in the future" is an easy response, but it does not explain the motivation for remaining ignorant until the confrontation and the blame attribution. I claimed this motivation to be a lack of care, and I believe that people should earnestly confront their carelessness, not just slur it over or make up some excuses. As a society, we need to face the fact that we left a remarkable part of the world to their destiny. Just take a look at the high level of life standard in the Europe continent and the African continent that is still tackling famine, pandemics, migration, and corruption. To change something, we need to ask ourselves how we became so numb, we need to face our ignorance.

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