Response to Four Commentaries
(Antony, Darwall, Thomas, Uleman) on “Privilege, Immorality, and Responsibility for Attending to the ‘Facts about Humanity’

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First off, I want to thank my commentators for their extremely provocative, insightful, detailed, challenging comments which helped me to probe many issues much more deeply than I did in my paper. I also thank Sally Haslanger and the editors of the web symposium for selecting my paper for discussion. This has been an invaluable opportunity for me.

Since there is not a lot of overlap among the critiques, I will treat them mostly separately.

1.

Laurence Thomas criticizes my project for its conclusion about responsibility and blame, arguing in favor of a more sympathetic view that since we know more now than we used to, we should not blame our moral predecessors who did not know these same things.¹ In his words, “The benefit of moral hindsight is never an excuse, let alone a justification, to be flippant about moral blame” (Thomas, 8). In my paper I am actually talking about people in this very day and age who have access to the facts that Thomas finds relevant to assessments of blame and responsibility, but who nonetheless act in the racist and sexist ways I’ve described. Thomas does not want to excuse these people, and on this much we agree. Of course, since Thomas casts my view about the “facts about humanity” as being at least part of the essence of being human, he thinks that these facts are ones that on my view hold over time, and that anyone could have had access to them, despite the state of our knowledge. So my argument should apply across time. This is half right; I think that because the facts about humanity get played out in practices that vary over time and across culture, in complicated circumstances ignorance may be justifiable. More on this later. For the record, I prefer to avoid talk of essences since I find that such notions have done much in the way of purportedly justifying relevantly unequal treatment of women and other disenfranchised groups. Thomas says that Darwin showed us that species do not have a rigid essence, and that this is “wholly liberating”(Thomas, 6). I agree. Rather than a defining essence, I consider the “facts about humanity” to be a normative mark of personhood that designate that a being is owed certain treatment. I understand the facts about humanity to be the view that all persons (not human beings) are rational, autonomous beings possessing dignity and deserving of respect (Superson, 34). Following Kant, a person’s capacity for rationality is marked by her or his having the ability to make plans and have goals,
interests, and desires; and, each person’s unique set of plans, interests, and so on mark her or his rationality and individuality. Having these features puts a being into the moral sphere, which warrants a certain kind of treatment. Kant may have meant them to constitute a rigid essence, but I do not. The concept is too nebulous to define all persons – in what sense do fetuses, the comatose, and the severely mentally handicapped have the capacity for rationality? Kant doesn’t have much to say about these cases, and for purposes of this paper, I don’t either. My point is simply that men’s rationality has been assumed and generally respected in our culture in comparison to women’s. If there is such a thing as the rigid essence of a human/person, it has historically varied along gender lines. And this has not been liberating for women.

This point aside, let me respond to Thomas’ argument against my view. Thomas says that we now believe MET, or, the principle of the Moral Equality of Treatment, which says: For any creatures X and Y: If X is a human being and Y is a human being, then moral equality obtains between them. MET is anchored by the “facts about humanity.” These facts have not changed over time, Thomas agrees, but our knowledge, which informs our sensibility, has changed, due to the way we come to learn these facts. To illustrate, Thomas asks us to consider two facts about humanity: Fact (1) Human beings walk upright; Fact (2) Regardless of phenotype, there is no morally relevant difference between human beings across groups. Fact (1) is what he calls “experientially secure,” meaning that it is pretty much how we experience the world, and that no scientific theory would strengthen our conviction (Thomas, 3). Fact (2), in contrast, is not experientially secure because we begin life experiencing humans (in our parents) as not being equal to each other. We come to believe (2) not through mere reflection, as he thinks I follow Kant in believing, but because of sophisticated results produced in evolutionary and biological theory (Thomas, 3).

We need Darwin’s theory to get these facts about humanity. But since people before Darwin did not have access to this knowledge, we can’t blame them in hindsight for their violations of these facts about humanity: their ignorance is an excuse.

I have four responses to Thomas’ thought-provoking argument. The first concerns “factual” research and moral conclusions. To my knowledge, much research in evolutionary psychology purportedly shows that women and men are genetically different, with men being more aggressive and competitive, devoting far more resources to status-seeking, and being stronger risk-takers, and women being more nurturing, empathetic, and less single-minded. This kind of data seems, at least without further argument, to threaten Fact (2), and so to threaten MET. So I am more leery than Thomas of putting a lot of stock in drawing normative conclusions from all and any scientific data.

On the other hand, there has been a lot of research in evolutionary theory supporting Fact (2) when it comes to race. But this is countered by (bad) research attempting to show that Fact (2), and so MET, are false. Consider that every couple of decades some scientist who is hell-bent for racist purposes on showing biologically-based racial differences puts forward another bell curve experiment linking race and intelligence. Or consider the many “men are from Mars, women from Venus”-type theories that are not grounded in evolutionary psychology (Carol Gilligan’s work might count here, and it drew a lot of attention from feminist philosophers). Much of this research (and perhaps even the research in evolutionary theory), might be, as many philosophers have argued, value-laden: “an experimenter finds what he or she is looking for.” So what makes us see the difference between good and bad research when it comes to Fact (2)? I believe, dissenting from Thomas, that it’s because when it comes to basic facts about humanity, it is true
that “Persons have always had all the reason that they could possibly need for seeing that phenotypical differences are utterly irrelevant” (Thomas, 2). Or at least we’ve had sufficient reason, and some scientific theories have later strengthened some of our beliefs.4

How so? This is my second point. I am not convinced that we begin life seeing persons as morally unequal, as witnessed in our parents’ relations and the power they have over us (Thomas, 4). Granted, we are always in a social environment—and most societies are sexist and racist—but our environment doesn’t always straightaway influence our beliefs, attitudes, and actions. Consider a simple case. My younger siblings, Tom and Kristin, used to play with the boy next door, Sammy, who was an adopted Panamanian with an Afro and dark skin. One day we overheard Tom and Kristin asking Sammy if they could touch his hair since it was so different from their own. Sammy complied, and touched their hair, and they all went on playing. Had Tom and Kristin incorporated racism full force at a young age, and saw Sammy as different in the relevant facts about humanity, they never would have played with him. I never would have played with Aida, my Puerto Rican friend, or let her borrow my bike had I believed my mother that Aida’s being Puerto Rican meant that she would lose my bike or even sell it. Even at the age of twelve, I had no idea about the stereotypes associated with Puerto Ricans, but saw Aida just as my friend (and yes, she brought back the bike). I’m suggesting that there are ways in which we see others as equal in humanity, but only until after we have learned the social, derogatory meanings of things like skin color, and incorporate the relevant prejudices, do we come to see others differently. We first experience the world in more morally neutral ways than Thomas would admit. We import meaning to our experience of the world based on our social upbringing. (Before I studied feminism, I was almost completely unaware of the stereotypes applied to women. I had to learn them, then re-

I am not suggesting that we are born knowing the facts about humanity. So how do we come to know them? I think we do probably through experience. We see others in physical pain, and we know how it feels from our own experiences. We come to know what it is to feel insulted or degraded, so we understand how others feel when they are treated these ways. We know what it is like for our interests to be ignored or set back, for our deepest self-defining desires not to be met, so we know how others feel when this happens to them. One thing’s for sure: when I catch myself having a racist thought, I don’t stop to think, “Darwin disproved racial differences.” (I don’t think this moves many racists or sexists either.) Rather, I pay more attention to my mother’s remark (that she made much more frequently than any racist remark) that “Oh, we’re all alike,” and to recognizing and then discounting the prejudices that my society has instilled in me. And I think that my mother’s statement is based less on society’s years of work on evolutionary theory, and more on her own interactions with different people.

Fourth, Facts (1) and (2) are significantly different, though both refer to humans, so I should say a bit more about what I interpret various events in my life as ones that, much as I didn’t want to believe, were sexist.) Indeed, even the Nazis who ran the concentration camps saw the Jews as equal humans, a fact that kept creeping into their minds throughout their dehumanizing treatment of the Jews. They had to conjure up ways of reinforcing the belief that Jews were inferior. Apparently SS members would shoot a person in the neck, and then cover them with dirt, dead or alive, when then fell into a ditch. But when their necks began to individualize the victims, and haunt the SS, reminding them that the Jews were equal in humanity, the SS members were given alcohol and required to work only an hour at a time at this task. Eventually gas chambers were developed to maintain distancing between the Nazis and their victims.5
mean about the “facts about humanity.” I mean this in a Kantian sense, that is, what gives persons (not necessarily humans) dignity. This is the capacity for rationality (which Kant believed even murderers have, and so are owed respect even though as moral persons they fell short of being owed respect), as marked by having desires, interests, plans, goals, and so on. These are different from biological facts, such as walking upright; they are what makes an entity a moral subject. Kant does not say a lot about the facts about humanity, but I think he must have meant that these were the kind of things that gave one a “mind of one’s own.” He must have meant to rule out as irrational desires that were had heteronomously; they would not mark an entity as being a person. The Deferential Wife and the Happy Slave take on others’ desires as their own. These are merely deformed desires, and don’t make one a person. (I’ll have more to say on this later.) Indeed, this is one way historically that masters of all kinds have attempted to deny the personhood of their slaves — making people complicit in evil, I said, was the worst kind of evil, since it is self-denying. Another thing masters have done is to discount or deny the interests or desires of the slaves. For instance, men have cooked up stories about women really wanting to be raped, or (in the case of middle- and upper-class white women) being happiest staying home raising children, or enjoying their dependence on men, despite the many ways that women have denied that these were their desires (think of women who hurled themselves down stairs in order to abort their fetuses so that they would not have to endure the hardships of raising children, despite the common belief that women are happiest in their mothering role). Surely even 1000 years ago people could have seen that women and blacks had interests, desires, and so on, almost as clearly as they saw that humans walked upright. And surely they could have seen, without the help of Darwin’s theory, that if it were wrong to discount these for some people, it would be wrong to discount them for others. Indeed, cooking up stories (and bad science) about what the oppressed really want, what is really in their interest, was likely done in response to the belief, given by reality, that women, blacks, and others are capable of being rational, autonomous beings in the first place. The real story is that their having autonomous desires did not serve the interests of men.

Thomas ends his commentary by raising some cases where it would not be clear what respecting another’s humanity would amount to. In general, I think that our practices indicating respect can vary over time and with cultures. And there is such a thing as false respect, as I tried to show with the practice of men opening doors for women — the same goes on in the case of women being allowed first off the Titanic into lifeboats. To show whether we are truly respecting women’s humanity, and not just putting them on a pedestal, we need to trot out background facts including how women are treated in the major institutions and practices of our society. So, sometimes it’s hard to know whether you are indeed respecting another’s humanity. Genuine mistakes can be made, I admit, and in these cases I would not place blame. We benefit from feminist analysis of our practices. When it comes to the practice of abortion, while Thomson’s arguments are sound, I think she needs to say more about bodily autonomy, specifically, what it amounts to, what its limits are. What the facts about humanity show is that women are treated as inferior to men when it comes to whether they are accorded the fundamental right to bodily autonomy — here I recommend Janet Gallagher’s insightful paper on how the law has protected only men’s rights in this regard. We allow judges, lawyers, doctors, clergy —mostly men— to decide what can and can’t be done to women’s bodies. We ignore women’s desires, interests, goals, and plans on this matter. Feminists know that this is what is going on (rather than a genuine reverence for fetal life) at least partly by comparing how women are treated when it comes to abortion with how they are treated when it comes to consent in sex or women-
battering. There is a consistent pattern, and it’s that women’s desires continually fall out of the picture while men’s move center stage. The facts about humanity explain this: when we deny women’s bodily autonomy, we deny their personhood, their having a mind of their own about something as fundamental as the governance of their own bodies. While the connections that feminists have made between these issues may be ones we wouldn’t expect everyone to see, we do expect them to see that if one group of people is accorded certain rights regarding their body, and another group is not, then they are being treated unequally. Maybe some scientific theories help us to see that women are not weak, passive beings who don’t have or don’t care about their own desires, but I’ll bet that allowing women into traditionally male spheres, and seeing that they can succeed often against great odds, has helped us even more. For that matter, paying attention to women’s “real” desires would help, too. If a woman is hurling herself down the stairs to abort her fetus, that’s a real desire not to be a mother!

2.

Louise Antony critiques my overall position because, she believes, the picture of psychological agency it depicts is “seriously at odds with reality,” and “promotes an ineffective approach to the eradication of social justice” (Antony, 1). She charges that I place far too much emphasis on individual intentions, actions, and responsibility, when I should pay much more attention to systematic or structural injustice that is not necessarily due to any individual malfeasance, as exhibited in Marilyn Frye’s example of Mr. X, who does not hire a qualified woman because he fears that his crew will not accept a woman’s authority. Since this background institutionalized sexism makes it harder for people to be good, we ought to change it, so that it’s easier for them to be good. We have a much better chance of eradicating sexism if we go this route than the way of blaming and holding responsible individual sexists, at least because we “locate the enemy outside the individual,” which is not as off-putting as singling out individuals for blame (Antony, 3). Indeed, Antony says that since I believe that privilege can make people have the traits of arrogance, self-centeredness, and not taking responsibility, which can then make them resist recognizing, understanding, and eradicating oppression but instead act in sexist ways, I really need an independent way of changing individual attitudes. Making structural changes is the way to go.

These are very insightful points, and there is much that I agree with here. I certainly didn’t mean to suggest that we did not need structural changes in order to eradicate sexism, and have argued for this in other papers. I state in the paper that “My focus is different from that standardly found in the feminist literature, which is directed at the institutionalization of sexism. Although this is crucial to the sustenance of sexism, a sexist system is generated and sustained partly by the immoral behavior of identifiable individuals who have some power to eradicate it” (Superson, 35). Two points here. First, the question before me is moral responsibility: Can we, and on what basis can we, hold persons responsible for sexist harms, some of which are defined best as complacency with the system, and others of which are the result of explicit direct acts of sexism? That is, there are two goals in addressing sexism, moral and political. A political goal is to eradicate sexism, and it very well may be that the best way to do it is to make structural changes. This is a great goal to have (I have it!), but not really my focus in this paper. The moral issue is whether and when we can hold someone responsible for sexism. I am interested in this issue independent of whether the answer we give makes any strides towards eradicating sexism. I am interested in the moral question for its own sake. Indeed, even if we were to make structural changes, there will still be sexists, and we have to address the issue of their responsibility. My interest in this topic was generated
by Larry May’s intriguing paper, “Shared Responsibility and Racist Attitudes,”11 in which he argues that even persons who harbor racist attitudes, but don’t act on them, and who do so in a society in which there are other racists who are willing to act on their racist attitudes, are responsible for the racism that occurs in that society. My goal, like May’s, was to assign some moral responsibility where it might have been previously missed. Traditionally, we have let people off the responsibility hook if they did not actually do something. Then we’ve had to argue (for instance, regarding passive v. active euthanasia) that there was no morally relevant difference between inaction and action, or that even if a person didn’t actually do something, she should have done something, and so is responsible. My argument was intended to widen the scope of moral responsibility in socially sensitive ways. Indeed, if we focus just on effecting structural changes, as good as they are for eradicating sexism, I fear that we will lose sight of the importance of individual responsibility, and the fact that people often ignore the role they play in sustaining the system. There is a lot we do in this regard, even though Antony is right that a lot of sexism is just plain systematic. And this brings me to my second point.

Even if much sexism is structural (and indeed it is), there are still individuals who oil the gears, who run the engine, and who are bigger cogs than others in the wheel of sexism. Some of these are the folks I have described in the list of immoralities discussed in the paper (and here I was just following the literature on evil, particularly Benn and Milo, who talk of “the morally indifferent person” rather than a morally indifferent act). Someone, or more accurately, some persons, set up the institutions and practices to have the pernicious sexist effects they have. This didn’t of course happen at once, and it has been reinforced over time, and perhaps these people’s efforts were even aided by “changes in the climate,” as Antony suggests. But feminists point to many individuals who played critical roles in the institutionalization of sexism, including Ronald Reagan, George Bush (both father and son), Randall Terry, a slew of judges and politicians, educators (Larry Summers, the Harvard president who recently said that women weren’t as good in science as men), and so on. The system just didn’t turn out, at its many levels and complexities, to disadvantage women and minorities, though of course once it gets set up it does run remarkably well by an invisible hand; still, many different people in different ways and to different degrees sustain and perpetuate it. Consider again Marilyn Frye’s case of Mr. X. Granted, he did not put the system in place. He might even be a good guy. But, he is complacent because he is willing to let sexism go on, for the sake of getting the job done. He seems a lot like the conscientiously wicked person I describe (Superson, 41). Even if he is not sexist in the sense of sexually harassing the woman applicant, as in Antony’s modified case, he is sexist on another level – he lets his fears about his crew’s acceptance of a woman’s authority, real or not, take precedence over what she is owed as a dignified human being. His morally required response is to set his crew straight, and defend her when they cannot accept her demands.

This case raises a deep question, namely, to what extent does a person have to participate in the system to incur responsibility or blame? Some complicating factors are that a person’s own sexist behavior is not always readily separable from systematic sexism, and the fact that one person’s actions, such as Mr. X’s hiring the woman, typically does not make much of a dent in a well-established system of sexism. Some cases tempt me completely to exonerate a person. The 15-year-old white person who is because of her privilege able to buy “flesh-colored” bandages that match her skin, is one such case.12 On the other hand, even this person contributes to maintaining a racist system, as long as all bandages are made this way. Now, she might discharge her duty of humanity by writing a letter to the Band-Aid company, or at least
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acknowledging her own privilege. I am far less willing to let off the hook the AM conservative talk show host who preaches hatred toward certain groups, because his actions really do seem to have a causal link with serious harms suffered by blacks. (Ditto certain television show hosts, like Maury Povich, who indirectly stir up feelings of hatred for groups that are stereotyped in extreme forms in his guests.) These issues are very difficult to sort out, because it can be unclear at what point we think a person ought to have known better, and done something about it. One thing I say in my paper is that knowing that others share in the basic facts about humanity is a very simple thing. The complicated part, I believe, comes in with figuring out how a person’s humanity gets violated. I think that we have to settle this on a case-by-case analysis. But I want us to exercise caution – I don’t want complicated feminist analysis to make us think that the person on the street is off the hook all the time. A person who sees that rape is wrong, notwithstanding complicated feminist analysis, should see that date rape is wrong. Some things are just a matter of treating other persons as ones who have legitimate desires and interests that they don’t want thwarted.

3.

Jennifer Uleman agrees with Antony that I should focus less on blame, but grounds her main objection to my project in Kant’s theory. Specifically, she points out that the duty to attend to the facts about humanity is imperfect because it does not correspond to a right on anyone else’s part to demand fulfillment, and that it is a duty of virtue, since no one can be obligated to attend to the facts about humanity all the time. So instead of focusing on blame, I should focus on “seeking and cultivating conditions for understanding, compassion, friendship, respect, and even love,” (as Uleman says I at points do) in order to change the privileged from their arrogant, self-centered, irresponsible selves to friendly loving folks who aim to eradicate oppression (Uleman, 3). Uleman agrees, then, with Antony that blame is not the best way to end oppression, and favors systematic changes.

Uleman’s objection calls for a more Kantian response than the one I gave to Antony. Here I want to appeal to Christine Korsgaard’s description of duties as outlined by Kant. Korsgaard describes duties of virtue as broad, telling a person to adopt and pursue certain ends. They are contrasted with duties of justice which are strict, requiring particular actions or omissions. Duties of virtue are broad because they cannot simply be discharged since their ends cannot be completely achieved – a person is always striving to be morally good or virtuous (Korsgaard, 20). While all duties of justice are perfect duties, Korsgaard thinks that Kant believes (but is not always clear) that there are imperfect and perfect duties of virtue (Korsgaard, 21). In general, perfect duties require definite actions or omissions; imperfect duties allow inclination partly to determine exactly what is needed to carry them out. Since “considerations of humanity” is a negative end, one that we should not act against, rather than a purpose to be achieved, duties regarding humanity are duties of virtue (Korsgaard, 17). If a duty of virtue is imperfect, there is a positive end to promote it, but the law (morality) does not say exactly how to promote it. A perfect duty of virtue arises because we must refrain from particular actions against humanity (Korsgaard, 21). In simpler terms, you always strive to refrain from violating another’s humanity – it’s not a duty that gets discharged in one particular action. Korsgaard gives us an example of a perfect duty of virtue, namely, a duty to yourself – your humanity in your own person – not to allow your honesty to be used as a resource for evil. So in Kant’s famous case of the murderer who comes to your door asking for his intended victim who is hiding in your house, you have a perfect duty of virtue, out of self-respect, not to allow yourself to be used in this way. It’s a duty of virtue, because we think of the case in terms of what a person of good
character would do to protect his humanity, but there is no duty of justice to lie. The important thing to notice is that the duties that concern me in my paper may, for Kant, be duties of virtue, but they are perfect duties as well, which call for us to refrain from particular actions against humanity.

It is true that I (unintentionally!) invoke a “virtue apparatus” in my argument that the privileged can step out of their position to see women as likes, which I believe they necessarily must do in order to appreciate fully the fact that women are persons with dignity in Kant’s sense. But the obligation itself to respect women’s humanity, I argued, is determined by the Categorical Imperative (Superson, 46-47). The idea is that the nonprivileged would not consent unless coerced to behaviors that were the result of a privileged person’s not appropriately attending to the nonprivileged’s humanity. That is, although the duty to respect another’s humanity is a duty of virtue since it’s one that a person must always honor, it nonetheless is a perfect duty of virtue, calling for a particular response (e.g., for the deadbeat dad to support his children). When a person violates his perfect duty, he is morally at fault, and so blameworthy. So I think there still is room for blaming on the Kantian scheme, though as Uleman rightly points out, there is room for cultivation of virtue. We need (at least) both, as well as the systematic changes that both Antony and Uleman call for, in order to end women’s oppression.

Uleman’s other worry about my project is that my argument leaves out another character, the “old-fashioned” racist or sexist, who is invested in oppressing or even annihilating the nonprivileged “because and insofar as they are human beings.” According to Uleman, their “privilege-sustaining acts and attitudes don’t stem from a failure to appreciate the humanity of the oppressed” (Uleman, 2). But I think that this person does fail to appreciate the humanity of the oppressed, in just the same sense that the wicked person whose immoral behavior stems from bad preferences or values does, namely, by focusing on the facts about humanity in others, but caring negatively about this in wanting to discount it or render it void (Superson, 42). The old-fashioned racist or sexist also most likely shares with the malignantly wicked person the motivation of envy or resentfulness; it is hard to imagine that anyone would dispassionately knowingly oppress another because of their humanity. I used the phrase “not appropriately attend to the humanity of others” to signal all the ways we might not disrespect others’ humanity, whether it be to discount it, ignore it, render it void, not care about it, and so on.

4.

Of all my commentators, Stephen Darwall probably agrees most with my view and argument for it. He offers an extremely useful way of expanding the notion of the facts about humanity that he develops in his own forthcoming book. The idea is this: it is not the simple facts about humanity that make us beings who must be treated in some ways and not in others; rather it is “the deep idea” underlying it, what Darwall calls “second-personal authority,” or, the fact that we all have the same standing to make claims and demands of each other and to hold one another accountable (Darwall, 2). This, he suggests, is what Kant means when he says that a person’s dignity is that by which he exacts respect for himself and all rational beings (Darwall, 2, citing Kant). In a nutshell, what this means is that to respect women is to recognize them as equal members of the moral community who are capable of entering into relations of reciprocal responsibility, making them beings to whom one is accountable in one’s treatment of them. A man who is immoral in the ways I highlight must be able to justify his behavior to women, in virtue not just of their equal humanity but of their equal fundamental authority. If he cannot, then he must accept responsibility and blame. Once
women are seen as equal in authority, ignorance is no excuse (Darwall, 3).

I think Darwall’s insight is exactly what is captured in Kant’s notion of co-legislation. In my paper I cited Thomas Hill, who argues that we must respect each person as a potential co-legislator of morality, and engage only in conduct with which we would expect all reasonable people to agree. Potential co-legislators are those of us who are in the moral community in exactly the sense Darwall attributes to Kant. And I think this was what I had in mind (though I certainly wasn’t as explicit as Darwall in bringing this out) when I said that women wouldn’t obey maxims that the immoralists I discuss aim to universalize unless they were coerced – women must have authority in order to dismiss maxims that involved disrespect for their humanity (Superson, 46). Indeed, the immoralists I discuss deny that they have to be accountable to women, since they ignore, set back, or discount their interests, even though some of them see that women have dignity. This is why I said that arrogance is displayed in immorality. The idea of accountability explains the significance of recognizing women’s humanity. It explains my appeal to consistency, that if the privileged see themselves as deserving of certain treatment, and see the nonprivileged as likes, then they ought to see the nonprivileged of deserving of relevantly similar treatment (Superson, 50). And it adds plausibility to the privileged’s claim that it is difficult to see others as likes, since doing so is bound up with being accountable to them.

Darwall’s proposal bears similarity also to Korsgaard’s analysis of Kant’s view of humanity. I want to unite their views in the following way. What connects having interests, desires, and the like with authority and accountability is reasons. It’s not just that we have interests and desires, but that we see their connection with autonomous action, that is, that we are prepared to assert to others reasons for our ends and actions that are typically motivated by our interests and desires. I think that for Kant, reason-giving is what ultimately gives us authority; what makes us accountable to others is that they are seen as authoritative in this sense.

Let me briefly highlight Korsgaard’s analysis. For Kant, every action contains an end (Korsgaard, 107). There must be one unconditional end, and that is humanity (Korsgaard, 109). The characteristic feature of humanity, or rational nature, is the capacity for setting an end, and doing so out of free choice. Every maxim contains an end, so in choosing a maxim, one chooses an end. Morally obligatory ends, which are “objective,” are given to us by reason and through the development of morality. As rational agents, we will choose good ends, which are ends that can be shared with others, making them “objective,” and completing and perfecting the capacity for reason (Korsgaard, 114). Good ends make the same claim on all rational beings, and so are completely justified. That is, all rational beings will agree on the ends as a result of our giving practical reasons for them (and for our actions) to others, and so they yield a duty to bring them about (Korsgaard, 117, 119). Now here’s the significant passage that links Korsgaard’s and Darwall’s views: “If you view yourself as having a value-conferring status in virtue of your power or rational choice, you must view anyone who has the power of rational choice as having, in virtue of that power, a value-conferring status. This will mean that what you make good by means of your rational choice must be harmonious with what another can make good by means of her rational choice – for the good is a consistent, harmonious object shared by all rational beings....The unconditioned goodness of anything is rational nature, or the power of rational choice. To play this role, however, rational nature must itself be something of unconditional value – an end in itself. This means, however, that you must treat rational nature wherever you find it...as an end” (Korsgaard, 123). To treat someone as an end in itself is to regard that person as one who confers value on the objects of her choice.
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(Korsgaard, 128). This is similar, I think, to Darwall’s notion of second-personal authority: being able to confer value on one’s end is to be able to put forward reasons for your ends (and actions), which is to be authoritative. Korsgaard concludes that for Kant, the possession of humanity and the capacity for the good will, whether or not it is realized, is enough to establish a claim on being treated as an unconditional end (Korsgaard, 124). That is, it is just your capacity to put forward reasons to other rational persons, whether or not you will put forward reasons that all will accept and that will make your actions that the reasons support good ones, that’s sufficient for making you a being we ought to respect. In Darwall’s terms, it is your authority that is sufficient for making you a being we ought to respect.

Let me end on a happy note by using Korsgaard’s account to go one step further than Darwall in suggesting a way to eradicate women’s oppression, which is a goal shared by all my commentators. As Korsgaard explains, for Kant, we all have ends, which are subjective, and are typically driven by our desires and interests. But they become moral ends when we all agree to them by putting forward reasons to others that they ultimately accept. Darwall quotes Kant as saying that the dignity of a person is that “by which he exacts respect for himself from all other rational beings in the world” (Darwall, 2). Surely Kant believes that no non-self-respecting person could exact this respect. We might be worried, in Korsgaard’s analysis, that women whose desires were deformed by patriarchy would put forward reasons for actions/ends that would further serve patriarchal ends. Such desires are often the source of servility. To be accountable to women, men also should discount women’s reasons when these are grounded in deformed desires, which are typically the result of coercion or deception. Men owe it to women as beings who exact respect. Women with deformed desires won’t genuinely be authoritative regarding morality. What is needed is a mechanism for eliminating such desires in co-legislating morality. Hill provides one: that when co-legislating, persons must be sincere, non-manipulative, not power-tripping but convince by argument, they should broaden their knowledge, see issues from the others’ perspective, and invite criticism of their own reasoning.17 To be non-manipulative is to recognize deformed desires and give reasons for not in any way basing morality on them so as not to recapitulate women’s oppression. To see things from another’s perspective is what it would take for the privileged to see the nonprivileged as likes. And this is something I argued they can and ought to do. Now armed with Darwall’s terminology, I can say that this is what they can and ought to do in order to recognize others as having authority.

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1 There is another interesting paper that employs a different argument from Thomas’ but shares his sympathy for exonerating on the basis of lack of knowledge people who play some role in oppression. See Tracy Isaacs, “Cultural Context and Moral Responsibility,” Ethics 107 (July 1997): 670-684.

2 Kant does believe this. He believes, for instance, that when fully rational, persons necessarily respect themselves. All you need do is to engage in rational reflection and you will see your equal worth. You will put aside strong social influences that tell you that you are inferior. And if you fail to recognize your equal worth, you simply are not rational. See Immanuel Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), 36, AKA 429. But I disagree with Kant, as I argue in my paper, “The Deferential Wife Revisited: Agency and Moral Responsibility.” (under review) Such a view is too harsh, it burdens marginalized groups, and it fails to recognize that a
A rational person can genuinely but mistakenly conclude that she has inferior worth.


4 Of course, many people deny even good scientific data. A CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll released in October 2005 showed that 53 percent of adults surveyed said that “God created humans in their present form exactly the way the Bible describes it.” *Chicago Tribune*, October 16, 2005, Section 1 p. 16.


6 See Stephen Darwall’s useful discussion of the different kinds of respect Kant employed, in his “Two Kinds of Respect,” in *Dignity, Character, and Self-Respect*, ed. Robin S. Dillon (New York: Routledge, 1995), 181-197. Recognition respect is the respect owed to persons in virtue of their being persons. Appraisal respect is respect for a person in virtue of something he is deserving of, for example, parts of his character.

7 Of course Kant himself was inconsistent when he applied his theory to women, not only to blacks. Nancy Tuana points out that although Kant said that we should never use a person merely as a means to our own ends, he also said that women’s rational capacities should not be developed because doing so would inhibit man’s development, including both man’s intellectual and moral perfections. That is, he makes the development of women’s rationality depend on men’s ends, despite believing that humanity should never be treated merely as a means to an end. See Nancy Tuana, *Women and the History of Philosophy* (New York: Paragon House, 1992).

8 I discuss these kinds of examples in “Deformed Desires and Informed Desire Tests,” *Hypatia* 20 (4) (Fall 2005): 109-126.


14 Christine M. Korsgaard, “The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil,” in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, pp. 133-158.


16 Christine M. Korsgaard, “Kant’s Formula of Humanity,” in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, pp. 106-132.