THE MORALITY OF RESISTING OPPRESSION

Abstract

This paper reconsiders the contemporary moral reading of women's oppression, and revises our understanding of the practical reasons for action a victim of mistreatment acquires through her unjust circumstances. The paper surveys various ways of theorising victims' moral duties to resist their own oppression, and considers objections to prior academic work arguing for the existence of an imperfect Kantian duty of resistance to oppression grounded in self-respect. These objections suggest that (1) such a duty is victim blaming; (2) it distorts the normative direction of self-regarding duties; and (3) that consequentialist reasons are inapt for justifying self-regarding ethical responsibilities.

The paper then argues that the need for normative coherence in our very concept of a moral duty is of paramount importance, and especially so in the fight against patriarchal oppression. Accordingly, we should acknowledge the salient differences between *pro tanto* or defeasible moral reasons and fully fledged moral duties identifying agent-relative obligatory action. The paper concludes that we better respect and defend women's rights when first we understand them as having, at best, defeasible moral reasons to oppose their oppression; and second, ensure that we make adequate allowance for a woman's interpretative right to choose how to respond to her oppressive circumstances.

Keywords: Kant, feminism, rationality, oppression, deontology, practical reason, specification.

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Introduction

What does morality require of me, if anything, when I am oppressed? Should I engage in a verbal confrontation with a group of builders who wolf-whistle me as I walk past? Should I request a meeting with HR when I discover my less-qualified male colleague is paid significantly more than I am? Should I make a placard and march through Parliament Square when the prime minister proposes yet more budget cuts to vital family and domestic violence services? To most people, the answer to these questions is a resounding yes—of course I ought to do these things. Similarly, most people would likely have no hesitation in qualifying that "ought" statement if it became clear that, for example, I would only endanger myself, my livelihood, or others by openly confronting my oppressors and/or my oppressive circumstances. What, then, is the exact nature of a victim's moral impulses in cases of oppression? What is the most accurate moral reading of the practical reasons for action a victim of oppression acquires through her unjust circumstances? This paper will survey various ways of theorising victims' moral duties to resist their own oppression, and argue against the idea that there is an imperfect Kantian moral duty of resistance grounded in self-respect. It will then put forward an alternative account which suggests that it may be both more normatively coherent and pragmatically useful to view oppression as generating agent-relative *pro tanto* or defeasible moral reasons for resistance on the part of the victim, rather than fully fledged moral duties to do so.

Theorising Victims' Moral Duties to Resist Their Own Oppression

There are two main schools of thought on the theoretical possibility of a victim's moral duty to resist their own oppression: so-called "other-regarding" accounts and "self-regarding" accounts.

Other-regarding accounts, perhaps better labelled agent-neutral accounts, theorise a victim's moral duty of resistance simply in terms of their broader duties of social justice. As members of oppressive social institutions victims are also thereby co-contributors to oppressive social practices and therefore have a moral duty to counter and correct it (Vasanthakumar 2020, 3). In this sense, a victim's own moral duty of resistance to their oppression is not unique to them in any particular way. It is not an agent-relative moral duty but rather an agent-neutral one, equally applicable to all participants in the oppressive social practices. It is grounded not in an individual's status as a particular victim of the oppression in question, but rather in their citizenship and participation in the social institutions and structures that generate and perpetuate the oppression that they, and others, suffer from. As such, their moral duty is of no qualitative difference to any other citizen's duty to resist oppression by promoting just social institutions and practices. Yet, as Vasanthakumar writes, to fail in this duty to resist, in other words to capitulate or acquiesce to living under unjust and oppressive social institutions and practices, is effectively to endorse, legitimise, enable, and even contribute to the oppression in question (3). Such conduct may even amount to tacit acceptance of the values which underpin the oppression, and ultimately normalise or even deny the fact of it, reinforcing the structural architecture of domination for generations to come (3–4).

By contrast, self-regarding, or agent-relative, theories of victims' duties of resistance ground them in a particular victim's ethical responsibilities towards themselves. For example, Thomas Hill (1973) has argued that a failure to value one's moral rights is a violation of a duty to oneself, while Daniel Silvermint (2013, 406) has argued that individuals have moral duties towards their own well-being, and under conditions of oppression these duties entail resistance to that mistreatment. One of the most richly theorised self-regarding accounts comes from analytic feminist philosopher Carol Hay, who has argued that women have an imperfect Kantian moral

duty grounded in self-respect to resist their own oppression.[1] Drawing heavily on Kant's supreme principle of the doctrine of virtue that "a human being is an end for himself as well as for others" (Kant 1996, 6:395–396) Hay argues that sexual oppression harms women's rational nature. In particular, she claims it damages women's capacity for practical rationality, including their capacity to form reasonable, practically relevant beliefs; to form reasonable, consistent intentions on the basis of those beliefs; and to deliberate practically from beliefs to intentions (Hay 2011, 24). This harm may also be manifested, she says, through encouraging women's self-deception;[2] preventing victims from using means-to-ends reasoning, or from selecting objectively valuable ends for themselves by depriving them of vital resources; or causing weakness of will (25; Hay 2013, 123–124). She believes that women therefore have a moral obligation to resist their own oppression, grounded in their Kantian duty of self-respect.

Hay characterises this moral obligation to resist oppression as an imperfect duty, which permits a degree of latitude regarding the actions which may fulfil it. Thus, the imperfect duty to resist oppression may be satisfied in a variety of ways—for example, by directly confronting one's harassers, notifying some authority, or raising awareness more generally. Crucially, Hay argues, it could also be satisfied by "resisting internally," for example, simply by recognising the moral injustice of the situation yet taking no external action.

Hay writes:

> There are many different forms that resistance to oppression can take . . . because the fundamental duty here is one of self-respect, even in cases where external resistance is imprudent or impossible, an oppressed person can still recognize that something is

[1] See Timmermann (2006) for further background on the nature of Kantian self-duties.
[2] For example, believing falsehoods about oneself contrary to evidence.

> wrong with her situation and that she deserves better. This, I argue, is profoundly better than nothing. (Hay 2013, preface, x)

Hay says that it is a distinguishing characteristic of Kantian imperfect duties that they permit a wider range of acceptable actions in fulfilling them than perfect duties. This is because imperfect duties require one to adopt a general maxim rather than to perform specific actions (Hay 2011, 29). She suggests that a general maxim for her victims' duty of resistance might be as follows: "There is an imperfect duty to protect one's own rational capacities by resisting oppression externally whenever prudent" (Huseyinzadegan 2015, paraphrasing Hay 2013). However, Hay maintains that just because imperfect moral duties lack a specified obligatory action does not mean that they are any less stringent than perfect duties. On the contrary, she argues, there is a strict duty to set the intention of resisting one's own oppression; there are just many ways to go about achieving this end (Hay 2011, 29–30).

Problematically, however, Hay also acknowledges that the degree and quality of latitude we have when meeting our imperfect duties is "up in the air" (30). We must take each duty individually, in context, and determine on an *ad hoc* basis what must necessarily be done, at a minimum, to satisfice it (30). Significantly, Hay's imperfect duty of resistance does not permit a victim the latitude to completely refrain from action. A victim may only permissibly refrain from external action under certain circumstances, and even then only providing the victim simultaneously recognises the injustice of her situation internally. Furthermore, refraining from external action must also be the best way to protect the victim's rational nature. This would be the case if, for example, resisting through external action would be dangerous or counterproductive somehow. Hay does state that a victim would still be acting in accordance with the general maxim to protect her rational capacities under the imperfect duty of resistance if she internally recognised her oppressive circumstances and opted to do nothing externally for prudent reasons. Yet Hay is also clear that the imperfect duty of resistance does not permit a victim to resist so rarely or

infrequently that the harms of oppression gradually accumulate and damage her rational nature (36). This is because, she says, "if we err on the side of caution in every case and never require women to confront their harassers, then patriarchy will never be eradicated" (Hay 2013, 104). As Vasanthakumar writes of Hay's analysis: "Under conditions of oppression, resistance is intrinsically self-respecting and autonomous . . . while acquiescence, as opposed to protest, expresses servility rather than self-respect" (Vasanthakumar 2020, 2; see also Superson 2010).

Hay's argument is both an ambitious reconciliation of Kantian moral philosophy and the goals of feminist theory, as well as a rallying cry to end patriarchal oppression. However, there are several theoretical problems which flow from her moral reading of oppression, and good reasons remain for some lingering reservations about her account of the moral reasons for action that victims of oppression acquire through their unjust circumstances. The remainder of this section of the paper will focus on exploring Hay's analysis of the Kantian imperfect moral duty to resist oppression and some of the theoretical issues it gives rise to. The second half of the paper will put forward an alternative account of Kantian moral obligations which shows oppression as generating agent-relative *pro tanto* moral reasons for resistance on the part of the victim, rather than fully fledged moral duties. Nevertheless, many of the arguments which follow might also be applied to other self-regarding or agent-relative theories of victims' duties, for these accounts share the same theoretical concerns about the very concept of a victim's moral obligation to resist their own mistreatment.

Objections to Victims' Moral Duties of Resistance

The Demandingness Objection

Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, Hay's idea that Kant's imperfect duty of self-respect morally obligates victims of oppression to resist can seem unwarranted. It is well known that by arguing

that failures in self-respect ultimately derive from failures of rationality, Kant was led to some morally unpalatable conclusions—for example, in his views on suicide.[3] For similar reasons as we would today strongly oppose the idea that an act of suicide must necessarily have resulted from a failure of rationality, it is difficult to agree that a victim of oppression who does not meet Hay's obligation to resist must have done so because of a failure of her rationality. Such a proposition not only seems a harsh moral judgment but furthermore seems to do no good towards the feminist cause. Burdening victims of oppression with a moral duty to resist their victimhood on pain of failing their categorical duties, no less, seems to place the moral obligation on the wrong shoulders.[4]

Hay acknowledges that her account of the obligation to resist oppression can appear to engage in victim blaming, and that this is "unfair." But she responds to this objection by claiming that "normative considerations of unfairness are not sufficient to dispel the existence of the obligation" (Hay 2013, preface, x). She writes:

> A reluctance to be guilty of blaming the victims of sexual harassment, coupled with other practical and normative considerations that tell in favour of the unfairness of this obligation, might make us think that women never have an obligation to confront their harassers. But I argue that the fact that women are oppressed is not usually sufficient to relieve them of their moral obligation to resist that oppression by confronting the men who sexually harass them. Normative considerations of fairness do not remove this obligation, even if we are willing to recognize that it is not fair that women are burdened by extra moral obligations as a result of their oppression. We can recognize that women's

[3] One who attempts suicide is said by Kant to have "discarded his humanity contrary to the highest duty we have towards ourselves" (1996, 149).

[4] It should be noted that this point is well established in feminist literature (see, e.g., Superson 2009, 153; 2010, 256; Stark 1997; Silvermint 2013).

> oppression leaves them with an unfair share of obligations and still be justified in saying that they have further obligations to resist their oppression. I argue that the fact that patriarchy harms women by burdening them with unfair obligations is just one more reason it must be eradicated. (Hay 2013, preface, x)

Elsewhere, Hay suggests that the answer to the victim-blaming objection lies in her characterisation of the duty of resistance as an imperfect one. She argues that if the duty of resistance were perfect, specifically requiring resistance every time someone was oppressed, it would likely be too demanding "given the ubiquity of oppression and the resilience of the systems that produce it" (Hay 2011, 29). But, she claims, the obligation she envisions is not to resist at every available opportunity; nor is it to resist "whatever it takes" (29). If resistance is impossible, dangerous, counterproductive, victimising, or if it heightens chances of retribution, or requires cooperation from others that is not forthcoming, then one may simply internally resist without external action. This, she alleges, shows that her duty of resistance is not onerous in the way the victim-blaming objection suggests.

It may be objected here that Hay's response does not truly answer the victim-blaming accusation. Imagine in the most egregious circumstances, where oppression takes its most insidious form, blinding the victim's own perception of her self-worth and rationality so severely that her preferences, interests, and ambitions become adapted to her subjugation in the saddest way possible.[5] In these cases, why should we still indict the victim for having failed her Kantian duty of resistance when the oppression she has been subjected to has effectively ruled out even the lowest bar Hay sets for satisficing it—that of internal recognition of her unjust circumstances? Just as in the case of suicide, surely the right moral reading of this situation cannot be that the

[5] For wider discussions of adaptive preferences, see Evans (2010), Malik (2011), and Marshall (2006).

victim's inability to recognise the wrongs being perpetrated against her means she has failed her moral duty to respect herself. Her ability to meet her duty by acknowledging her subjugation has been destroyed by that very domination, and so to continue to demand it of her surely violates Kant's own "'ought' implies 'can'" maxim.[6]

Hay does draw a distinction between women who fail to resist because they are unaware that they are being oppressed, and those who simply cannot be bothered to make the effort to resist. In the latter case Hay says they have fundamentally failed in the duty of self-respect, whilst in the former case Hay says the obligation to resist is still present, but they are excused from blameworthiness (Hay 2011, 39–40). Significantly, she also states that any argument advocating that internal resistance might sometimes justifiably be foregone would effectively amount to a claim that the victim needn't be self-respecting in those circumstance—and this, she says, is a difficult argument to make out, requiring an independent explanation (38).

It might be objected here that if Hay's analysis argues for an obligation which a victim need not externally carry out when the circumstances of her oppression are particularly egregious, this shows that she is not, in fact, committed to indicting the victim for failing to resist in the way that the victim-blaming accusation suggests. But it is odd to say that we have moral obligations which we need not carry out, are exempt from carrying out, or are not culpable for failing to meet. Indeed, in order to accept Hay's suggestion that it is not normatively problematic to identify a moral duty which we need not meet, her argument requires some further explanatory distinction between those moral duties which we are compulsorily bound to meet (and which we may justifiably be held to be blameworthy for failing) and those which we are exempt from meeting. They cannot be the same thing, because the normative landscape is very different in each case, and yet Hay does not supply this distinction. Without any explanation of the difference Hay relies upon here between compulsory and noncompulsory moral obligations, her

[6] "The action to which the 'ought' applies must indeed be possible under natural conditions" (Kant 2007, 473).

argument does effectively indict the victim of egregious oppression to the extent that it identifies her as having an obligation she cannot meet—even if she is to be held nonculpable when she fails to meet it. This is what renders Hay's analysis vulnerable to the demandingness objection: it unfairly indicts the victim of egregious oppression simply by claiming that she has failed her obligation to resist, even if further downstream that failure is said to be excusable.

The problem is that the flexibility permitted in meeting imperfect duties cannot go far enough to let Hay off the victim blaming hook. There inevitably must come a point, even with imperfect duties which permit a wide range of permissible actions, when that duty has been failed; and failure of a moral duty must mean something significant. In the context of the duty of resistance that Hay envisions, that failure is most likely to occur in the most egregious contexts of subjugation, since the bar for satisficing the duty is low enough to include simple internal acknowledgement without external action. Yet it is in precisely these cases of oppression that we should not think that victims have failed any kind of moral obligation, even blamelessly.

If seriously oppressed women are effectively prevented from relating to themselves in self-respecting ways, then they suffer a unique moral injury. But this moral injury is not a result of their moral failure. By way of illustration, Hay's analysis would seem to let the wealthy, financially independent, well-educated Western woman off the hook if she were to refrain from external action against the group of wolf-whistling builders across the street because it is dark and there are six of them; yet it would seem to indict the uneducated, impoverished, male-dependent woman in rural India for lacking the bare capacity to recognise that her situation is oppressive in complex intersectional ways. Such a woman might foreseeably miss even the lowest bar Hay sets for satisficing her imperfect duty to resist, that of recognising the injustice of her situation. To be clear, Hay thinks this woman is not culpable for this failure. But her analysis nevertheless commits her to the conclusion that she has failed a moral duty.

More theoretically concerning, however, is the fact that it is not convincing to assert the continued existence of a moral obligation despite overriding moral reasons releasing the victim from being bound by it. Why not simply acknowledge that it makes no normative sense to claim that the victim has a real moral obligation here? Hay's analysis ends up in an otherwise avoidable tangle because she commits herself prematurely to the identification of fully fledged moral duties and ignores the role *pro tanto* moral reasons play in practical deliberation when identifying compulsory actions. To clarify: the tangle results from Hay's insistence that an independent explanation is needed for why victims of egregious oppression should have different duties of resistance than victims in less egregious contexts, when this explanation is actually unnecessary; a mistake born of misreading the *pro tanto* moral situation in terms of fully fledged moral duties rather than defeasible moral reasons. Rather, both types of victim have, at most, *pro tanto* moral reasons to resist their oppression: for one victim, these reasons are borne out in practical deliberation, while for the other they are simply overridden by countervailing moral reasons.

This paper will return to make out the details of this objection to Hay's analysis later. For present purposes it is sufficient to note that, despite Hay's disavowals of victim blaming, there will still come a point when a victim of oppression might fail her imperfect duty of resistance—and even if this claim is tempered by holding the victim not culpable for this failure, it is nevertheless inherently problematic when we are talking about women's oppression.

Normative Distortion in Kantian Self-Duties

Hay's argument also appears to distort the normative direction of Kantian duties of self-respect. The primary failure of rationality in her examples of sexual harassment lies in the practical

deliberation of the oppressors, for failing to treat another human will appropriately as an end in itself rather than as a sexually objectified means to their ends. As such, the obligation Hay asserts on the part of the victim to resist her own oppression not only sounds heavy handed, even in the imperfect form that Hay envisions, but also seems to up-end the moral direction of Kantian duties of self-respect, which are primarily concerned with the quality and appropriateness of one's own behaviour towards oneself. Kant's vision of self-duties primarily concerns a moral agent's regard for their own rationality, not their response to other people's failure to respect them. I fail my obligation of self-respect when I fail to treat my own will in the appropriate way Kant requires of me, not necessarily when I fail to confront others for failing to treat my humanity appropriately. Permitting someone to persist in treating me in an oppressive way might effectively allow them to frustrate my rationality, but that is not the same thing as frustrating my rationality myself or treating myself instrumentally—particularly when permitting them to behave in this way through a positive choice of nonresistance may be the only practicable option I have open to me.

It might be objected here that respecting one's own rationality effectively requires you to resist oppression because that is just part of asserting the rationality that others wrongfully disregard when they oppress you. But it is important to recognise that there is nothing within Kant's duty of self-respect that requires this kind of external action. It is a duty I owe directly to myself, and to myself alone. It is entirely foreseeable that there may be situations in which I can fulfil my duty of self-respect internally whilst simultaneously externally ignoring mistreatment from others. Indeed, it would be a mistake to think that externally asserting one's rationality is a hard requirement of one's self-duty.

It is also important to recognise the moral inversion Hay falls into of interpreting Kantian self-duties as placing an obligation to resist on the shoulders of the oppressed, even though the idea that women have a special moral obligation to resist oppression sounds like an inspirational call

to feminist action. Indeed, a more uncharitable reading of Hay's argument might suggest that her notion of a feminist Kantian duty of self-respect seems only to work for those women who already have sufficient resources to resist their oppression, or to know when to decline to act upon it; leaving others who are most vulnerable—those living without a basic level of intellectual or material resources—under a double moral burden. There is also the problem of epistemic privilege to consider here. While it may frequently be true that victims of oppression are best able to explain what a remedy to their mistreatment ought to consist in, this can easily slip into epistemic exploitation. Nora Berenstain (2016) has argued that epistemic exploitation occurs when privileged actors compel victims of oppression to educate them about their experience of oppression. Providing this education is not only another form of forced labour that is "involuntary, taxing, and uncompensated," it also reinforces oppressive structures by prioritising the needs of the privileged over those of the oppressed, and represents another mechanism for extracting value from the oppressed for the benefit of the privileged (Berenstain 2016; Vasanthakumar 2020, 7).

Hay does acknowledge this problem, writing:

> We need to recognize that a woman who has been harassed suffers real harm—psychological, social, and emotional—and by saying that she has an obligation to confront her harasser, we impose a further burden on her. Because she hasn't done anything wrong, it seems unfair to demand that she take on the burden of trying to rectify the situation . . . there is concern that obliging women to resist sexual harassment risks shifting the moral burden away from harassers and onto their victims. (Hay 2005, 103)

But she nevertheless concludes:

> I'm also no apologist for patriarchy: I don't want to excuse or justify the ways in which it harms women. If it turns out that one of the ways that patriarchy harms women is that it burdens them with unfair obligations, then this is just one more reason to eliminate it. I think there is good reason to believe that women's obligations to resist their oppression—and thus to confront their harassers—*are* unfair. But unfair obligations are obligations nonetheless. (Hay 2005, 104)

But this just raises the question what exactly is a moral obligation that is "unfair"? A deeper analysis of this question forms the next part of the article.

Does "Ought" Imply an "All-Things-Considered Ought"?

Moral obligations seem, by their very nature, to be all-things-considered duties we owe in virtue of the constellation of relevant moral reasons which combine to prescribe right action in particular circumstances. Identifying and ascribing moral obligations allows us to identify, first, the actions we are bound to perform, and second, the times when we have failed to do something we should have done. But how can we fail to have done what we morally ought if that obligation was not fairly imposed upon us? In virtue of what kind of moral reason could a moral "ought" statement be considered unfair? The very idea of an unfair moral obligation is a bit like claiming one ought to do something one should not have to do, which sounds a bit like moral nonsense.

It could be suggested that the notion of an unfair moral obligation simply refers to the duties we have under nonideal circumstances. But this misses the root of the objection here. Nonideal circumstances can certainly make the execution of one's moral duties practically difficult, or

psychologically unpleasant, and can obviously contribute their own particular set of countervailing moral reasons for action. Yet none of this extinguishes the fact of obligatory moral action. Furthermore, experiencing real-world practical or psychological difficulties in meeting one's moral duties is not what Hay is referring to when she writes that one should not have to resist one's oppression under patriarchal domination. This latter claim is a normative one, concerning what one ought to do; it is not a claim about the difficulties of applying ideal principles in nonideal circumstances. For example, imagine a victim's testimony in court at her sexual abuser's trial. Hay's analysis foreseeably commits us to thinking that testifying is morally obligatory for the victim in most cases. Testifying in court is not impossible, dangerous, or counterproductive; nor does it obviously heighten the chances of retribution, or require cooperation from others that is not forthcoming. So, if Hay is right, we must get on and do it.[7] Our moral duty is to confront and resist our oppression, no matter if our real-world circumstances make testifying in court frightening, re-traumatising, or ultimately unsuccessful. But Hay does not say that the duty to resist oppression is difficult and unpleasant in real-world circumstances; she says that it is unfair—and furthermore, for all that it is unfair, it remains obligatory. Yet if compelling testimony in court is truly unfair, as opposed to being just difficult and unpleasant for the victim, then it is wrong to conceive of it as obligatory. Is it not that the real-world, nonideal circumstances which make testifying in court difficult and unpleasant negate its obligatory nature; rather, it is the moral fact of the injustice of the situation that means we must climb down from the statement that we are morally bound to do it. Of course, many good, strong moral reasons for testifying remain in spite of its difficult and upsetting nature. It just cannot be obligatory.

Nevertheless, Hay continues to press the idea of an "unfair obligation" to resist:

[7] It may foreseeably be re-victimising, however, in which case Hay's analysis would presumably be that it is a nonculpable failure of duty to refrain from testifying.

> I suggest the reason we *think* that moral obligations don't apply to those who lack autonomy is that it would seem profoundly unfair to require moral obligations of someone who was incapable of actually fulfilling them . . . [but] . . . thinking about obligations in this way . . . leaves room for cases in which *the appropriate amount of moral obligation to demand does not appear to be in direct proportion to the amount of autonomy an agent actually has*. (Hay 2005, 99; emphasis added)

But now two further problems arise. First, Hay implies that there is nothing obviously incorrect about demanding obligations from those who lack full autonomous capacity to control their actions. Second, and perhaps more theoretically problematic, she argues here as if moral obligation were a quantifiable and proportionable shades-of-grey concern. But this cannot be correct. What exactly would a small "amount" of moral obligation look like, as opposed to a larger amount? Obligations are, by their nature, things we are bound to do, and that nature cannot therefore be anything but all-things-considered. At the point at which an obligation becomes impossible to perform, it violates Kant's own "'ought' implies 'can'" maxim; and by the time an obligation becomes morally unjustifiable to demand, it cannot sensibly be said to still be obligatory.

More fundamentally, however, it is impossible to envisage what a proportion of the obligation to resist would be. Moral obligations are comprised of many constituent moral reasons for action which together combine to prescribe obligatory action. But the many potential constituent moral *reasons* to resist oppression are not necessarily the same thing as a moral *obligation* to do so, by any means. *Pro tanto* moral reasons are defeasible in character, unlike the all-things-considered nature of fully fledged moral obligations, and this subtlety is lost on Hay's analysis. Despite her disavowals, by accepting Hay's argument we are at best coming perilously close to engaging in victim blaming, and at worst perhaps even flying in the face of Kant's own prerequisite maxim

that "ought" implies "can" in the most egregious circumstances of oppression. But while one might be able to dispute that "ought" implies "can," one cannot sensibly dispute that "ought" necessarily and decisively implies "ought."

We might be able to make Hay's proposition work if she were to admit the *pro tanto* notion of moral reasons in practical deliberation—for example, if she were to claim instead that a victim has a defeasible *pro tanto* moral reason to resist her oppression which might be qualified, or even defeated, by countervailing moral reasons not to do so in the particular circumstances. But she does not do this. She instead identifies a fully fledged moral obligation to resist, not its constituent moral reasons which we engage with in practical deliberation, and she does so before the all-things-considered position in morality has been ascertained. Her identification of the moral obligation to resist oppression can therefore seem premature, for it is this which leads her into the uncomfortable normative territory of having to argue for the survival of a moral obligation in the face of good moral reasons against its very existence.

It might be objected here that, on the contrary, it does make sense to say we have moral obligations that can be overridden. But this is not self-evident. Indeed, it makes more sense to say we have moral reasons that can be overridden, while obligations, properly so-called, identify our all-things-considered compulsory actions. Kant himself was an internalist about reasons and obligations; he held that having a moral obligation (for example, to treat the human will as an end in itself, and never as a means) necessarily entails a moral agent having a reason to act upon it. So, for Kant, rather than moral reasons being prior to obligations, our obligations necessarily mean we have reason to fulfil them. By contrast, the argument I have put forward here is an externalist account, in the sense that moral reasons represent external facts which are independent of the motivational condition of those for whom they are reasons. On my account, we first ascertain our external moral reasons based on some prior interpretation of our primary

values at stake (e.g., equal moral respect); we then deliberate practically to arrive at an understanding of the moral duties we are bound by, which prescribe compulsory action. There is room on this analysis to accommodate some leftover moral "residue" (Oberdiek 2008, 143)—that is, the good moral reasons we could not act on and so have reason to regret, nonculpably. In this sense, my account does not jar with the Kantian model, since it also views moral obligations as entailing practical reasons for action. It just positions general, defeasible moral reasons prior to the identification of moral obligations; and specific, compulsory practical reasons for action appear downstream of that identification. Thus, in the context of women's oppression, my account suggests a different story about a victim's practical reasoning:

(1) First one determines the primary moral values at stake (e.g., equal moral respect, or perhaps some conception of self-respect for rationality or dignity).
(2) Next one identifies the full set of defeasible moral reasons, several of which may conflict with each other (e.g., reasons to resist oppression and reasons to shield from further harm).
(3) Then one identifies compulsory moral duties through practical deliberation which seeks to resolve the value conflicts among defeasible moral reasons.
(4) Finally one acquires specific, practical moral reasons for action derived directly from one's moral obligations.

There may be moral residue (i.e., defeased moral reasons) for which one may experience regret for having "lost" in practical deliberation, without having acted culpably.

Much of this seems to match Kant's own characterisation of the absolute nature of moral duty and the possibility of conflicts between moral obligations. In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant writes:

> *Conflict of Duties:* is a relation in which one duty would cancel out another duty (wholly or in part). However, 1. Since duty and obligation are concepts that express the objective practical necessity of certain actions, 2. Since two rules opposed to each other cannot be necessary at the same time, 3. If it is a duty to act in accordance with one rule, Then to act in accordance with the opposite rule is not a duty but even contrary to duty. 4. Therefore a collision of duties and obligations is inconceivable. (Kant 1996, 6:224)

However, Kant's account is problematic when he asserts absolute moral obligations precisely because he does not take into account any context-specific countervailing moral considerations when he makes this claim. For example, we can agree that Kant is right, in that there is primary value in truth (perhaps grounded on some explanation about the importance of truth to one's dignity, or one's rational ability to reason from means to ends); and this gives us defeasible moral reasons to tell the truth. The all-things-considered position in morality will be that we should either tell the truth or not, depending on the particular circumstances in question. If we cannot or should not tell the truth depending on the moral circumstances in question, we might feel regret about that (moral residue), but we will not have acted culpably by lying.

What Kant ultimately says about conflicts of duty does not therefore seem particularly problematic. Duties cannot conflict if we conceive of them as an absolute. But if this is our concept of duties, they should demarcate the all-things-considered position in morality rather than any more general or universal claim. Duties cannot be both universal and absolute. For a number of reasons, we need our obligatory "ought" statements to decisively indicate "ought," not "ought but for a number of other moral considerations"—particularly so when we are talking about challenging patriarchal oppression. What Kant fails to do is elucidate any of the practical deliberation that is necessary to reach such a position of "all-things-considered"

morality.[8] Yet subjecting one's *pro tanto* moral reasons to some kind of value-conflict resolution methodology is just part of the messy business moral agents have to engage with when trying to identify the right course of action. Mistakes will, of course, be made; humans are inherently morally fallible, and nonideal circumstances make this all the more difficult. But holding off "ought" statements about fully fledged moral duties until after this deliberation has been completed preserves the clarity and normative force of these kind of "ought" statements, where and when we deploy them.[9]

Moral Duties or *Pro Tanto* Moral Reasons?

One might question what is the benefit, if any, of switching from the paradigm of moral obligations to that of *pro tanto* moral reasons? Is this not simply superficially altering the terminology with which we describe the same moral situation, without adding anything further to our normative understanding of the matter? To this objection it may be responded that there are several good reasons for acknowledging the normative difference between *pro tanto* moral reasons and fully fledged moral duties, and especially so in the context of women's oppression.

Firstly, our intuitive understanding, and practical observance, of moral duties seems to correlate them with conclusive normative implications regarding our individual reasons for action. When someone fails to meet a moral obligation, we tend to follow this failure with certain kinds of judgments of moral responsibility, like criticism, labels of blameworthiness, and sometimes even punishment. This is because we consider the action to be morally obligatory—in other words, compulsory and nonoptional. Indeed, it seems to be generally implied that there are no countervailing moral considerations when we say, without further explicit qualification, "My duty

[8] Something Kant himself always kept in the dark, in the "noumenal world"; see Dworkin (2011a), 19).
[9] I am particularly grateful to the anonymous peer reviewers for helping me clarify my views on this.

is to do x" or "I have an obligation not to do y" (Brandt 1964, 377).[10] Yet, if this is the case, and moral duties really do have this kind of final and conclusive obligatory nature, it then becomes philosophically problematic to explain what happens to them when they appear to conflict with other moral reasons for action. It is this kind of problem that we face when, for example, a victim's moral reasons for self-preservation seem to mitigate her imperfect duty of resistance. There is always a philosophical difficulty when moral reasons for action, or the values they serve, conflict. It has been suggested by Jeremy Waldron (1989, 505) that conflicts essentially present us with a choice to make between "incompossible" duties. For example, if two children are sick, but their doctor has only a single indivisible dose of medicine available, each child seems to possess a right to be given the dose, and their doctor may be said to have a corresponding duty towards each child to give them that dose. Yet, quite plainly, meeting both these duties is impossible. The problem with true conflicts of incompossible duties such as this one—and therefore, the challenge for any ascriptive theory of moral duty like Hay's—is how to justify meeting one duty over the other. Any choice about which duty we should meet appears to illegitimately trade off our conflicting duties against one another; yet, on the other hand, it cannot be morally correct to do nothing simply because we cannot rationally justify a way to choose one duty instead of the other.

It has been said that there is no better test of an account of human obligations than the plausibility of what it has to say about those obligations in conflict (Griffin 2009, 57). Indeed, some think it may be impossible to fully understand the nature of moral obligations without an account of what happens when they conflict (Wellman 1995, 271). However, if the very rationality of our practical deliberation is threatened when we are faced with normatively incompatible moral obligations, we might be tempted to argue backwards, as it were, and

[10] I am treating duty and obligation as synonymous terms, on the grounds that the core necessary and sufficient conditions for identification in either category is precisely the quality of obligatoriness, and susceptibility to culpability for transgression.

conclude that moral duties cannot be the final and conclusive indicators of obligatory conduct that we thought they were. Perhaps moral duties do not really function as indicators of justifiable blameworthiness when moral agents violate them? This approach, however, is a mistake. Reverse engineering our normative conception of moral duties in order to salvage our rationality when faced with hard choices is an unsatisfactory resolution. Rather, the way we theorise about obligations, conflicts, and their resolution depends to a large extent upon how we conceptualise the deeper philosophical nature of those obligations, and the normative implications which follow them (Waldron 1989, 507).

The theoretical plausibility of situations of truly incompossible duties appears to rest on a deeper assumption about the pluralist nature of values and their incommensurability—that is, the idea that values lack a common measure and therefore cannot be gauged in relation to one another (Chang 1998). Therefore, when values conflict, any choice will inevitably result in a loss or violation of one of the values. If two incommensurable values pull in such different normative directions that there is genuinely no way to rank, order, measure, or relativise one against the other, it does not matter how long we deliberate, nor which value we ultimately decide to act upon—when values are incommensurable in this way then the loss we incur when we choose one cannot ever be replaced or compensated for with what we gain by choosing the other. It is this prospect that seems to threaten the rationality of our practical reason when we are confronted by moral conflicts, for any choice we make will certainly mean we have neglected some moral obligation or failed to act upon some right reason in making that choice. Therefore, we inevitably fail to do something we ought to have done when we make choices about incommensurable value conflicts.

Problematically, the practical necessity of actually making choices about right action in situations of incommensurable value conflict can encourage mistakes, such as thinking of values in

quantitative rather than qualitative terms, or thinking that some values are somehow more important than others in particular circumstances. For instance, in a putative conflict between Hay's imperfect duty to resist oppression and a victim's prudential reasons not to endanger herself, while both are obviously valuable ends, we might be tempted to try reasoning our way out of the conflict by thinking that the duty of resistance is more important, or generally more beneficial to society somehow, than the prudential reasons of those who might incur unpleasantness and inconvenience (as opposed to danger or serious harm) by confronting their oppression—as many feminists conceivably might. If we do this, however, then we allow ourselves to be led into trading off the allegedly smaller, or less important, risks against the supposedly much greater, or more important, gains in opposing patriarchal oppression. But this is inherently problematic, for it fails to reflect the very incommensurability of values we found ourselves torn between because we have effectively allowed ourselves to be seduced into commensurating them in a rather opaque fashion, which obscures the fact that we are resolving the conflict through moral intuition. This is precisely the type of reasoning about our moral obligations which Hay advocated when she spoke of "proportionate" moral obligation (2005, 99).

The disjunctive solution to this difficulty suggests that as long as a particular course of action is chosen on the basis of some right reasons, that choice should not be considered wholly unjustifiable simply on the basis that good reasons also existed not to choose it (Jacquette 1991). For example, if good moral reasons to choose either resistance or self-preservation exist in a particular context of women's oppression, both options might be considered "rationally eligible" and therefore justifiable. Jacquette has acknowledged that in moral dilemmas, where circumstances prevent two or more equally justified *prima facie* ethical requirements from being fulfilled, "commonly received deontic logic suggests that conjoint obligation is overridden by Kant's principle that 'ought' implies 'can,' and the agent nevertheless has a disjunctive obligation

to perform one of the otherwise obligatory actions" (Jacquette 1991, 43); while Thomas Nagel (1991, 172) suggests, along similar lines, that if good moral reasons exist in favour of either course of action, then either choice may properly be considered blameless, if not necessarily morally admirable.[11] For example, if a woman were to make a decision under situational pressure not to resist her oppression, Nagel's analysis might suggest that no cause for moral blame would exist for her choice. For Nagel, difficult situations exist which demand hard decisions. Rather than indict people for making these decisions, we should instead recognise that we are simply doing the best we can in nonideal circumstances, even if ultimately that is only a second best (172).

This disjunctive approach to deontic conflict suggests that, at first, a woman may be faced with what appears to be an incommensurable value conflict between good moral reasons to resist her oppression and good prudential moral reasons to self-protect. However, at the point at which she realises that both courses of action cannot be followed simultaneously, and a difficult choice must be made, the woman's moral reasons for action fundamentally change. She now has an overriding moral reason, perhaps even a moral duty, to act on one of the conflicting moral reasons she initially perceived, rather than freeze like a rabbit in the headlights and fail to act on either. Indeed, perhaps omitting to act might be the only outcome where she could be held morally culpable, if her overriding moral reason is now to meet at least one duty rather than fail two. Her initial moral reasons for action have become qualified: she now has a disjunctive moral obligation to meet *one or the other* of her originally conflicting moral reasons. While this does nothing to ease the practical deliberation required of her in the heat of the moment, it does provide a way of thinking about the resolution of value conflict which preserves her rationality when tasked with choosing between two incompossible duties. Furthermore, this construction of

[11] Nagel's example of incompossible duties was choosing who to save between two equidistant drowning swimmers.

moral conflict leaves room to accommodate a certain attitude of regret within the moral agent when she realises that she could not act on all the good moral reasons that originally presented themselves. Room for regret for the unacted upon moral reasons is a natural human reaction "after the fact," and importantly need not be directly related to any identification of morally obligatory action, nor to any violation of moral obligations by the agent.

Whatever one thinks of these suggestions, one need not seek a conclusive resolution to the question of incommensurable values in order to fully understand what is potentially problematic about Hay's conception of moral duty. It seems likely that a conflict of incompossible duties was not the situation Hay primarily meant to describe. She focused on examples in which the duty of resistance would trump other moral considerations, rendering it "unfair" but still obligatory nonetheless; and she gave alternative examples in which prudential moral reasons for shielding overrode the duty of resistance, leaving the duty itself intact and the moral agent in question blameless for violating it. Hay therefore seems to acknowledge the need to make difficult decisions in times of incommensurable value conflict quite readily, and she can foresee what she intuitively thinks those decisions should look like. In fact, she does not paint a picture of women torn between incompossible duties at all. On the contrary, Hay seems to be quite pragmatic about the fact that decisions about the right course of action in situations of conflict must be made in the real world, yet her resolution feels like a hasty leap to the conclusion that sometimes we simply cannot do better than to inevitably fail at least one of our moral obligations.

We need to reconsider the way we theorise about obligation conflicts and their resolution. To posit a universal moral duty before the all-things-considered position in morality has been ascertained leaves us with a situation where we lack normative clarity over the meaning and consequences of the term moral obligation. This is of particular significance when we are talking about challenging the systemic domination of women. Moral duties are best seen as

manifestations of the prior moral grounds for fully justified obligatory conduct, and as such, they function as determinate and final conclusions about the moral obligatoriness of our reasons for action, rather than peremptory or defeasible partial moral explanations for what one may or may not be eventually morally required to do (Oberdiek 2008, 127). What we might have thought of as a universal moral duty (for example, Hay's general maxim to protect one's rational capacities by confronting oppression wherever prudent) is actually a nominal placeholder for a cluster of specific, individuated, and particularised moral permissions and obligations that exist in virtue of all the relevant moral considerations which bear on a particular moral relationship between two parties in context. This view of moral duties imposes a particular structure to moral reasoning on account of their moral features. Moral determination of justifiably obligatory action comes prior in practical deliberation before any general assertions of moral duty. On this account, specific moral duties to behave in particular ways remain *post hoc* manifestations of our final normative conclusions about our reasons for action.

My account of moral duties inherits a great deal from the specificationist theory of rights, which was first written about by Judith Jarvis Thomson (1986, chap. 3) and later developed into a more sophisticated account of rights conflicts by John Oberdiek (2008). Specification theory itself is morally neutral; it is a theory of the moral structure of entitlements and obligations, and of how they conflict. It is not a substantive theory positing any particular view about the actual entitlements or obligations that moral agents have, and it implies nothing by itself about the contexts in which the duty to resist oppression should trump conflicts with countervailing prudential moral reasons for self-preservation. Rather, specification theory requires further moral substantiation in order to reach a full elaboration of rights entitlements and moral obligations. What specification theory does claim is that specified entitlements and obligations are always absolute and can never be morally overridden. Accordingly, every rights infringement is also a wrongful rights violation (Shafer-Landau 1995, 209). The same may be said about moral duties:

every failure of a moral duty is also a wrongful breach of that duty. If this is correct, then Hay's idea of an "unfair moral obligation" is a nonstarter. This is due to the special role accorded to rights entitlements and moral duties in deontological moral theory. Lesser moral considerations, like common or garden variety defeasible moral reasons, may be overridden in practical deliberation, but rights entitlements and moral duties may not. This special place that rights entitlements and moral duties occupy derives from the logical normative implications of possessing them. Rights entitlements and moral duties are normatively special because when and where they exist it follows that we are culpable for acting in ways which infringe them (Shafer-Landau 1995, 221).

By contrast, virtues, ideals, and supererogatory behaviour do not possess this special characteristic of entailing conclusive verdicts about the overall justifiability and obligatoriness of our actions, for it may sometimes be permissible to act contrary to ideal, virtue, or supererogation. Neither do *pro tanto* moral reasons have this special nature, as they may be viewed instead as defeasible calls on our practical reason which may subsequently be overridden by competing moral considerations. Any normative inconsistency or conflict between *pro tanto* moral reasons is dealt with by a moral agent's individual practical deliberation and will depend on their particular methodology for value-conflict resolution. *Pro tanto* moral reasons therefore may have universal applicability but are not absolute moral requirements, since they are liable to being overridden in this way.

Hay's account does acknowledge these issues when she allows that some victims of oppression have circumstantial conditions which excuse their failure to meet their moral obligations, meaning we cannot blame them for their failure. Yet she also insists that we still need to eradicate patriarchal oppression, and until we do, women will just have to shoulder an unfair moral burden despite there being good moral reasons against it. But these kinds of normative

gymnastics citing excusable failures to do what one morally ought to do are not only unnecessary but add to the lack of clarity we so urgently need in the context of resisting oppression. To talk prematurely of universal moral duties to resist oppression in the way Hay does seems to reify what is really a *pro tanto* moral reason for resistance into something that sounds like an all-things-considered conclusion about our compulsory reasons for action. But resistance to oppression cannot be an all-things-considered statement of compulsory reasons for action because Hay asserts it as a universal moral duty, before it has been through any deliberative value-conflict resolution methodology during which the all-things-considered position in morality is ascertained.

This problem is not unique to Hay's argument, by any means. The tendency to reify what are really *pro tanto* moral reasons into quite different claims about the all-things-considered position in morality is problematic across normative theory, and particularly in rights conflict theory. It is, however, a distinct problem for Hay's argument because it muddies the sense of right and wrong we so desperately need in the context of women's oppression. It is particularly problematic to put forward an account of a victim's moral duty to resist oppression that many feminist scholars find victim blaming. However, if we only refine that notion of moral obligation then much of Hay's argument retains its value for both Kantians and feminists alike. The benefits of my approach are that we would no longer be committed to believing in "grey areas" of moral obligation, proportions of moral obligation, or the counterintuitive notion of "unfair" moral obligations, as Hay's analysis led us to be. Thinking first in terms of *pro tanto* moral reasons also means we avoid victim blaming when particular moral considerations against resisting egregious oppression override our general moral reasons to confront it; and we avoid distortion in the normative direction of Kantian duties towards the self.

Thinking in terms of *pro tanto* moral reasons rather than fully fledged moral duties also means that we do not lose the moral urge to confront and eradicate patriarchal oppression without

inflating it to a justificatory role. It should be noted that Hay effectively makes out a secondary, consequentialist argument for the existence of her duty to resist by citing the urgent need to eradicate the patriarchy (Hay 2013, 104). When pushed for further explanation of her double moral burden on victims of oppression, Hay's answer is that we owe it to ourselves because we must eradicate the patriarchy. But it is far from clear that such a reason could actually justify the kind of self-duty, even an imperfect one, which Hay envisions. It is a mismatched argument to claim that we owe ourselves a Kantian duty of self-respect to resist oppression because a world without patriarchy is better. While eradicating the patriarchy is no doubt a consequence that would be inherently good for all concerned, we cannot justify a Kantian self-duty on this kind of consequentialist reasoning. If such a universal moral obligation really does exist, its justification must be grounded wholly in some independent argument about the nature of the self, and the kinds of attitudes and behaviours we owe ourselves.

On this argument, perhaps it could be suggested that if a victim fails to resist her oppression, she cannot be said to have lived a good life, or it could be said that she may have failed to have lived well in terms of forming, revising, and pursuing a conception of ethical value for herself. [12] But (and herein lies the real benefit of admitting the *pro tanto* account of defeasible moral reasons) to have failed to select ethical value for herself in this fashion would not necessarily need to have come about due to a failure of her rationality or a violation of her moral obligations—and there is some significant moral solace to be found in that conclusion. A victim's resistance to her own oppression is better characterised as an interpretive right, in which case we can simultaneously believe that she attains both a good and a better life if she selects and pursues ethical values for herself which do call for resistance, but not that she has failed any moral obligation if she does not. By characterising resistance to oppression as a moral duty rather than an interpretive right, Hay seems to have failed to make adequate allowance for a victim's ability to choose to respond

[12] I am drawing here on Dworkin's (2011a, 202–210) conception of the ethical responsibility to live well by selecting the values one wishes to live by in accordance with one's moral duty.

to her circumstances in the way she best sees fit, which seems crucial to our recognition of a woman's ethical autonomy.[13]

Conclusion: The Morality of Resisting Oppression

Throughout her work, Hay paints a picture of the spectrum of choices a victim might select from when meeting her imperfect duty to resist sexual oppression, depending on the particular situation—choices including overt verbal outrage, physical violence, appealing to higher authority, and silent protest. Yet given that one can still transgress this imperfect duty, Hay cannot escape the charge that her theory will be victim blaming. If she cannot, and Hay envisions her imperfect duty of resistance to be effectively unenforceable in pragmatic terms, it therefore seems that a more accurate reading of the moral situation to say that victims have, at most, a *pro tanto* moral reason to resist, not a fully fledged moral duty. Thus, while Hay's idea of a duty of self-respect to resist oppression supplies a powerful call to arms for the feminist cause, we should remain cautious of the limitations of her argument for the most vulnerable; and we should be wary of the moral distortion it seems to demand of the direction of Kantian self-duties. Chiefly, we should be concerned with preserving the integrity of the idea of moral obligation and avoiding the conflation of *pro tanto* moral reasons with fully fledged moral duties. Preserving this moral clarity, correctness, and power is of the utmost importance in the context of eradicating oppression in all its forms—even if that comes at the cost of apparently "downgrading" a universal moral duty to resist patriarchal oppression to a defeasible *pro tanto* moral reason. While Hay's claim that such a universal moral duty exists is a powerful rhetorical

[13] Hay does acknowledge the objection that resisting oppression might be seen as supererogatory or heroic, and therefore inappropriate for blame if one fails to do it. But she repeats her response that the characterisation of the duty as an imperfect one can meet this objection (see Hay (2011, 29).

tool, this cost is a necessary one: women stand more chance of winning the battle against patriarchal domination without overstating or misattributing moral obligations in our haste to improve the quality of lives of women around the world.

Hay's work makes out a fascinating and rich case for an imperfect Kantian duty of self-respect to resist sexual oppression. In many ways her work charts new and fertile territory for the moral philosophy of oppression, as well as for her skilful reconciliation of Kantian moral theory with the goals of feminism. This paper's response to her account of the imperfect duty of resistance has been to laud these achievements, whilst suggesting that it may be more normatively accurate and pragmatically useful to think of this duty in terms of *pro tanto* moral reasons, and to avoid prematurely identifying fully fledged moral duties, even imperfect ones. If we can avoid victim blaming, distorting the normative direction of Kantian self-duties, or committing ourselves to concluding that a victim whose self-esteem has been completely obliterated in the most egregious circumstances of oppression has failed her moral duties, we will have a stronger account of morality in the context of oppression. By adopting the *pro tanto* account of moral reasons, we also preserve the clarity and normative force of "ought" statements, which then decisively imply "ought," not "ought but for any number of other countervailing moral considerations." We are left with no grey areas of obligation, no philosophically unclear notions of unfair obligations, and moral duties remain an all-things-considered indicator of morally obligatory action. In other words, we lose nothing in terms of nuance and gain everything in terms of clarity by switching paradigms from all-things-considered duties to *pro tanto* moral reasons. We also retain the valuable consequentialist reason Hay identifies for eradicating the patriarchy without inflating it to a justifying ground upon which we base our moral self-duties. This argument does not require us to abandon the general idea of self-directed moral responsibilities or to think that victims of oppression do not have these moral requirements. It just reformulates moral responsibilities in less absolute terms, as defeasible moral reasons. The

benefit of switching paradigms from moral duties to *pro tanto* moral reasons is not simply a superficial function of the terminology we happen to use to describe situations of oppression. Thinking in these terms allows us a more nuanced understanding of how the varieties of oppressive circumstances can be taken into practical moral deliberation, without losing the moral motivation to confront and eradicate patriarchal oppression.

A woman's interpretive moral right to resist her mistreatment comes with the ability to waive this opportunity should she so wish, just like any other right. A woman has the right to speak freely but never a duty to speak. She has the right to life, but there exists no duty to live if doing so is against her wishes. Her choice to contest her own oppression, even if backed up by incontrovertible moral reasons to do so, should never be inflated into a moral requirement to act at the cost of her ethical autonomy.

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