

Holding People Responsible for What They Do Not Control¹

As Scanlon has memorably claimed, when we hold people responsible for what they did, we must

‘[r]ecognize that what separates us from such people is not just, as we would like to think, that we behave better and choose more wisely, but also our luck in being the kind of people who respond in these ways. In this respect our attitude towards those who suffer or are blamed should not be “You asked for this” but rather “There but for the grace of God go I.”’²

Assumptions about the absence of ultimate control over one’s actions (expressed above as the presence of luck and God’s grace) pose problems for accounts of responsibility. If what people do is not ultimately under their control – because, for example, they have no ultimate control over the type of persons they are and the type of persons they are determines what they do – then holding people responsible for their actions and on the basis of their actions amounts to holding them responsible for what is a matter of luck to them.³ Famously, some have defended holding people morally responsible for what is a matter of luck to them in this sense.⁴ Even if such arguments are persuasive when holding people responsible amounts to praising or blaming, they are not obviously relevant when

holding people responsible amounts to bestowing upon them burdens and benefits of the type that are the concern of distributive justice. This latter understanding of responsibility – which I will refer to as consequential responsibility – is at the heart of current debates about egalitarianism. Specifically, egalitarians debate whether it is egalitarian to leave some worse off than others if they themselves brought about their own disadvantage. In other words, what they ask is whether it is egalitarian to hold people consequentially responsible for disadvantages they bring upon themselves. But if people do not ultimately control what they do then to hold them consequentially responsible for disadvantages resulting from their actions amounts to allowing pre-existing inequalities of luck to translate into inequalities of advantage. And this, understandably, strikes many egalitarians concerned with fairness⁵ as unfair and inequalitarian (even if ultimately required by some broader understanding of justice): as analogous to allowing other factors over which people do not have ultimate control – the congenital shape of their cheekbones, for example – to determine their position in life.⁶

The egalitarian worry, then, is that agency cannot give rise to differential consequential responsibility in a way consistent with egalitarianism unless it is something over which agents have ultimate control and which is in this sense not a matter of luck to them. What I hope to show here, however, is that this worry is misguided and, importantly, that it remains misguided even if we accept that there really is something unfair about differentiating between people on the basis of factors they did not ultimately control.⁷ This is because the unfairness of differentiating between people on the basis of factors they did not ultimately control is trumped by even greater unfairness when no

such differentiation is allowed. Indeed, what I will try to show is that not ever holding people consequentially responsible would undermine what must be a fundamental commitment of any acceptable egalitarian theory: the commitment to respect equality of moral status between people.

Specifically, I argue in this paper that when agency is appropriately expressive of reasons, certain types of conduct – even if no conduct is under anyone’s ultimate control – can serve as the basis of attributions of consequential responsibility. My defence of this position develops in six sections. In section 1, I outline one prominent egalitarian view that denies that consequential responsibility can be attributed on the basis of agency in a world in which people do not have ultimate control over this agency. I call this view the Same Outcomes Solution (SOS). I then, in section 2, suggest why the SOS in particular, and a wider class of distributive views in general, are incompatible with the normative truth of the equal moral status of agents, and why this incompatibility undermines their purported egalitarian status. This section contains the outline of my argument, which is then examined in more detail in section 3 through 5. In section 6, I complete my argument by explicitly drawing out the implications of my position for a range of scenarios in which it might intuitively seem that responsibility ought to be attributed to people.

If my argument is successful, then egalitarians can impose standards of conduct on people that specify how to act in order not to suffer disadvantage. Naturally, imposing standards of conduct upon people is the bread and butter of political theory. However, I

argue that such standards can be imposed on people even if it is ultimately a matter of luck to them if they can meet the standards and even if the omnipresence of luck is seen as undermining equality. Although my argument here is explicitly focused on the problems faced by egalitarians *vis-à-vis* attributions of consequential responsibility in a world without ultimate control, in showing that such attributions are open to egalitarians, it also suggests that they are open to non-egalitarians who care about the equal moral status of people.

1. The Difficulty With Responsibility

Imagine a world in which people do have ultimate control over their agency, i.e. it is entirely up to them who they are and how they act. In such a world, provided that resources⁸ have been justly distributed to start with, it would not be troubling, from the perspective of egalitarian justice, if someone (A) ended up worse off than another (B) due to his conduct (say A spent all his money on caviar).⁹ Similarly, if A took B's resources, egalitarians would ask A to return these resources to B. And A would have to return these resources to B even if it meant that he would end up worse off than B as a result (for example, because he has already destroyed what he had taken from B so he now has to deplete his own initial resources). Although A ends up worse off than B in both of these scenarios, that he ends up like this is under his ultimate control and is, therefore, not subject to egalitarian redistributive measures. Indeed, to help A would amount to subsidising him and thus treating A and B unequally.

Imagine now a world without ultimate control. In this world, people act as they do because they have been programmed (created, conditioned etc.) to act this way. Imagine that A's conduct in such a world leads to his ending up worse off than B. How should egalitarians respond to this situation? One important answer takes the following form: since it is unfair to allow some to end up worse off than others due to factors over which they had no ultimate control, resources between A and B ought to be redistributed (at some stage) to ensure that A does not end up disadvantaged. This answer, which I have branded the SOS, thereby disallows holding people consequentially responsible for the outcomes of any of their actions in a world without ultimate control.¹⁰

Of course, accepting the SOS is compatible with recognising that as far as justice that goes beyond egalitarian justice (let alone other values than justice) is concerned, there are other considerations in favour of leaving A worse off than B and they are likely to prove conclusive; it is, after all, hard to imagine an acceptable world without something resembling consequential responsibility. However, what interests me here is whether, once these other considerations are put aside, egalitarians really are unable to justify attributions of consequential responsibility?

2. Why Egalitarians Must Attribute Responsibility

To make inroads into this question let me put aside, until later, the discussion of cases in which a person brings about her own disadvantage; I will focus instead on cases where one agent deprives another agent of his share of resources. This, I believe, is the fastest

route to diagnose what is unacceptable about the SOS. Imagine again a world without ultimate control (and scarce resources). For simplicity imagine also that there are only two individuals, A and B. Resources have been (re)distributed and at time T1 equality obtains between A and B and equality is assumed to be just. At time T2, however, additional resource X appears (let's say it's manna from heaven in that no one has a special claim on X in virtue of how X came to exist). To ensure continued equality, X has to be divided equally between A and B.¹¹ Moreover, let's assume that both A and B are capable of normal reasoning and guiding their actions in the light of reasons (to the extent that it is compatible with lack of ultimate control). Moreover, both A and B believe that they are each entitled to only half of X. A, however, decides to disregard B's entitlement and it so happens that he is able to secure all of X for himself (perhaps he simply takes it when it is left unattended by B). Having taken all of X for himself, A then destroys it (without thereby becoming better off than B).

The SOS, as we have seen, recommends leaving things as they are since to ask A to give the equivalent of half of X to B would now make A end up worse off than B. To see what's wrong with this recommendation notice that in taking all of X in the circumstances of the scenario above, A has treated B as someone whose claim to half of X need not constrain A from taking all of X to himself. Indeed, A has treated B as inferior. Moreover, as a result of being treated as inferior by A, B was denied access to resources that ought to be his. The SOS, in not requiring A to return the equivalent of the half of X to B allows that B's access to resources be permanently affected by A's willingness to treat B as inferior. In allowing B's access to resources to depend on

whether others treat him as a moral equal, the SOS violates whatever constraints are placed on what can be done to people by the fact that they enjoy equal moral status with others. But this is precisely what no egalitarian (or indeed no one concerned with justice in general) can allow and why the SOS must be rejected – the SOS simply sacrifices the most fundamental requirement of egalitarian justice, and indeed justice as such.¹² And, of course, rejecting the SOS allows differential consequential responsibility to get off the ground.

The above statement of my position contains many claims in need of unpacking. What does it mean to treat others as inferior? Is such treatment possible in the world without ultimate control? What is equality of moral status? Why are its requirements violated when people are deprived of what they have the strongest claim to by others who see them as inferior? And why must egalitarians prioritise the requirements of equality of moral status when they conflict with those of the SOS? In what follows I give my answers to all these questions. In doing so I also try to show why, if it is appropriate to hold A consequentially responsible in the scenario above, it is also appropriate to hold people responsible in a much wider range of scenarios.

Before I begin answering these questions, however, let me emphasise one feature of my argument. I criticise the SOS for allowing the final distribution of resources to depart from what would otherwise be an ideal egalitarian distribution simply because some treat others as inferior. Since the success of my argument does not depend on a detailed specification of this ideal egalitarian distribution – and indeed any such detailed

specification might detract from my main point – I am going to leave it largely unspecified. It is nonetheless important to note that adopting the SOS is not the only way to depart from the ideal in question, however it is specified. Another way to depart from the ideal distribution, for example, would be to hold that in the scenario above B ought to have some fraction of his half of X returned to him, just not the entire half. Simply put, we depart from the distributive ideal in question not only when we make no room whatsoever for consequential responsibility for treating others as inferior but also when we make too little room for it. This means that my overall argument is aimed not only against those who want to secure equality of outcomes but also against those who want to distribute opportunities (equally or not) in a way that still allows what people end up with to depart from what they should have if no one treated them as inferior. For simplicity, however, in what follows I focus my critique on the SOS since it is the most extreme way of negating what I believe an egalitarian must assert. I will continue to rely on stylised examples involving A, B and X although, for simplicity, in what follows I will refer to the share of X that, if the SOS is wrong, ought to be B's, simply as 'X'. Having outlined my defence of consequential responsibility, I examine next its main elements. I begin in the following section by asking what it means to treat someone as inferior and whether such treatment is possible in a world without ultimate control.

3. Treating Others as Inferior in a World Without Ultimate Control

3.1. Treating Others as Inferior

We treat people as inferior when we manifest through our actions (that include omissions) that we recognise them as inferior, and we recognise them as inferior when our assessment of them is logically incompatible with recognising them as having at least equal moral status with ourselves or others. But this fairly uncontroversial view of when we treat people as inferior does not capture all instances of such treatment. For it seems to me that we can treat people as inferior not only when we do not realise that we manifest seeing them as inferior through actions but even when we do not realise that we see them as inferior. That it is possible to act on reasons blindly, so to speak, is well illustrated by cases of love and hate which can stir us into action even before we realise that love or hate is indeed what we feel towards others. Just as in such cases we can treat lovingly those whom we love only unselfconsciously, it would also be correct to say that we can treat people as inferior even when do not know that our actions towards them stem from an attitude of superiority towards them or even when we do not know that we have such an attitude towards them. Therefore, we treat someone as inferior when we merely act on a reason whose acceptance is logically incompatible with recognising that person as having at least equal moral status with ourselves and others. For simplicity, we can say that in all types of cases the inferior treatment stems from seeing others as inferior if we stipulate that we can unselfconsciously see people one way or another.¹³

Of course it will never be easy to identify accurately and beyond any doubt situations in which a person treats another as inferior, especially when she is mistaken about the reasons she acts on. Nonetheless, it should not be difficult to accept that such situations can – and do – arise. Think here, for example, of a person who is consistently careless with money and always expects others to help her out without giving any thought to how this affects their ability to provide for themselves. At the same time, we should not forget that the flip side of the possibility that we can treat others as inferior without realising it, is that we can treat people as moral equals while mistakenly believing that we treat them as inferior. For example, a person could be so concerned to treat all people as her moral equals that she would obsessively worry whether she does, and would often succeed in persuading herself wrongly that her actions stem from inappropriate reasons. What matters in the assessment of a given action is how people really see others, not how they think they see them, even if in practice we may not always succeed in pulling the two far apart.

There are, of course, multiple way of manifesting seeing someone as inferior through actions. Since I am concerned in this paper with the distribution of resources, the type of conduct (inferior treatment) that I focus on here is one that deprives B of access to resources that B would otherwise have. Of course, what B would otherwise have may well be what is A's to take – it is just that A would never take it unless he saw B as inferior. I think that the idea that one can treat others as inferior in depriving them of what is not in fact theirs, fits well with our intuitions. For example, it seems to me that we would want to say that a person who refuses to admit someone to his house because he

sees that person as a pest, does treat this person as inferior, even though he is entitled to refuse entry to his house.

But while there is a sense in which it is always wrong to treat one's moral equals as inferior, such treatment becomes especially significant from the viewpoint of egalitarian justice when it deprives someone of proper access to resources, that is access that this person (B) would have if he was not treated as inferior by A and A was not otherwise entitled to the resources that his treatment of B as inferior would deprive B of. Inferior treatment of others that deprives them of proper access to resources becomes especially significant from the viewpoint of egalitarian justice because not to demand that the proper access to resources be restored in such cases is to allow that these people's entitlements be affected simply by the fact that others are unwilling to treat them as moral equals. But before I spell out precisely what is wrong with the latter, let me first answer the question whether treating others as inferior (or in any way at all for that matter) is even possible in a world without ultimate control.

3.2. Agency In a World Without Ultimate Control

Could persons in a world without ultimate control treat each other in any way at all?

Clearly not all beings can do that. There exists a species of ant that makes a species of beetle secrete a substance that the ant eats.¹⁴ It hardly follows, however, that the ants treat the beetles as inferior and that is because ants are not organisms that can treat anyone in any way. Should humans in a world without ultimate control be considered as creatures

that can treat others as inferior? After all, we would not obviously think that about robots that have been programmed, say, to hit people; but human beings without ultimate control over their agency may seem perfectly analogous to such robots.

In my view the answer to the question of whether, in a world without ultimate control, humans can treat others as inferior (or, indeed, in other ways) is unequivocally 'yes'. And the best way to see this is to focus on extreme examples. Even if we accepted, as some do, that certain SS guards in concentration camps were somehow conditioned to see and treat prisoners the way they did, it would not follow that therefore they did not see and treat these prisoners as inferior as long as they were able to reason about their actions (able to consider reasons against their actions even if not able to recognise such reasons as valid). Lack of ultimate control does not mean that actions become devoid of normative significance as long as actions are appropriately expressive of reasons, by which I simply mean that they stem from reasons, including moral reasons, one has for them when one is capable of assessing reasons in the light of other reasons (correctly or incorrectly) as well as empirical reality.¹⁵

Certainly I am not claiming that every instance of behaviour can be seen as agency appropriately expressive of reasons. There are many examples of conduct that throw doubt on an agent's capacity to reason: one might react to spiders with panic or one may kill because of a minor insult. So while I reject the assumption that any abnormal conduct must necessarily indicate that one's agency is not expressive of reasons, I also accept that some agency is not appropriately expressive of reasons.

How far is it possible to distinguish between agency that is and agency that is not appropriately expressive of reasons? One avenue to pursue to cash out the difference between the two is to focus on the immediate causes of the conduct in the brain of a given agent by investigating if some neurological deficiencies effectively impair the agent's reasoning. Admittedly, however, we do not have a sufficiently complex understanding of human brains to be able to capture with confidence much of the difference between agency that is and is not appropriately expressive of reasons. Focusing on the brain, therefore, can only take us so far.

Even in the absence of any evidence of neurological deficiencies, we should not see agency as appropriately expressive of reasons in at least two types of case. First, subject to a caveat I mention below, agency is not expressive of reasons when someone acts on an urge or an impulse that is not refined enough to generate the realisation that the satisfaction of the urge is important and merely amounts to the agent's often unselfconscious pursuit of the object that would satisfy the urge. An agent may experience an overwhelming desire to consume food without this desire being translated into a reason of any kind to consume (that it will taste good, or quench hunger etc.); he may even lack awareness of his engaging in consumption. Second, subject to the same caveat, agency is not appropriately expressive of reasons when someone is incapable of comprehending moral concepts in general (as opposed to merely assigning the wrong importance to the values expressed by different moral concepts).¹⁶ Obviously, however, the fact that the agency is not appropriately expressive of reasons at time T2 must itself

not be due to agency that was appropriately expressive of reasons at time T1 – when this happens there is a sense in which agency remains appropriately expressive of reasons at time T2.¹⁷

I do not deny that there exists a characterisation of agency falling under either of the two categories just mentioned, or resulting from neurological deficiencies, as in some sense expressive of reasons. Such agency, however, cannot be seen as appropriately expressive of reasons to allow agents who engage in it to treat others as inferior. After all, moral reasons against a course of conduct are not processed by the agent in question and hence what the conduct expresses is not a stance on those reasons but rather utter ignorance of them. But this means that such an agent cannot deny that others have equal moral status since to be able to deny it he would have to be able to assess this proposition. On the other hand, where an agent's conduct does express a stance on reasons to recognize others as moral equals, it is irrelevant to the question of whether he treats others as inferior that he cannot change which reasons strike him as correct and which as faulty. This is why even in a world without ultimate control people can – and do – treat each other as inferior. And noticing this is important because it opens up the possibility of attributing responsibility.

Of course, as should be clear by now, the fact that an agent's conduct is appropriately expressive of reasons and that the person treats another as inferior does not suffice to conclude that such agents can be held consequentially responsible by egalitarians. What must also be shown is that allowing inferior treatment to determine anyone's proper

access to resources is incompatible with upholding equality of moral status and that such equality must be upheld even when it conflicts with securing equality of outcomes.

4. The Incompatibility of Equality of Moral Status and Equality of Outcomes

4.1. Equality of Moral Status

The proponents of the SOS could accept the suggested understanding of when people treat each other as inferior, accept that such treatment is possible in a world without ultimate control, and nonetheless deny that A's treatment of B as inferior could ever affect B's proper access to resources. They could respond that, in a world without ultimate control, any claim of B to X that A may be violating when he also reaches for X is not robust enough to ground the requirement that X be returned to B when that would upset equality of outcomes between A and B. In other words, the proponents of the SOS could claim that in a world without ultimate control all entitlements to resources are simply always conditional upon the resources in question not being needed to ensure distributive equality of outcomes.

Once the SOS is understood this way, however, it is not hard to see why it must conflict with upholding equality of moral status. Equality of moral status is an elusive ideal¹⁸ but, whatever else it requires, at a minimum equality of moral status imposes constraints on what can be done to people and does so for every person: it grants everyone entitlements that are not conditional upon there being no one who wishes to violate them simply

because he or she does not recognise others as moral equals. It is of course quite possible that the ideal of equal moral status requires more than the above but it could not possibly require any less.¹⁹ Therefore, at the very least, to be a being with a moral status is to be a being to whom certain things should not be done simply when (and because) others reject the requirements that one's moral status places upon them (or, for short: deny, violate or do not uphold one's moral status). Moreover, such things should not be done in the normative sense that, even if they are actually committed, they remain wrongs that ought to be redressed. Many have persuasively argued that to be a person is precisely to be a being whose moral status offers one some protection from the actions of others in this sense.²⁰

Of course what precisely should not be done to a person, will depend on which specific theory of justice is adopted. My claim here is only that no theory of justice could respect the equal moral status of persons if it did not grant that all persons should have entitlements that make their holdings or situations immune to at least some forms of interference by others, and specifically to interference due to the fact that others see them as inferior. But the SOS does not grant such entitlements: after all, in the examples above, whether B ends up with X depends on whether A treats B as inferior. Importantly, therefore, it is not just A who, in taking X, denies B's equal moral status – it is, more importantly, the SOS that denies it as it does not grant B the protection against A's willingness to treat B as inferior. In not granting B such protection the SOS thereby admits that upholding equality of moral status between A and B must take a back seat to ensuring equality of outcomes. In doing so the SOS equates egalitarianism with the

striking view that people should not have access to certain things simply because others do not want them to.

4.2. Protecting Equality of Moral Status

Attributions of consequential responsibility can then be thought of as a way of ensuring that no one's proper access to resources is diminished simply because of inferior treatment by others. But notice that B is not protected from having his proper access to resources diminished by those who treat him as inferior just as long as these others have to return to B what they directly took from him. For it would appear that B's proper access to resources is also diminished when someone creates a situation, because he sees B as inferior, in which B is forced (by a third party) to give up some of his resources for that person.²¹ Specifically, there are two different ways in which A can treat B as inferior in creating situations in which B is forced to give his resources to A. First, A can act in a way that results in his disadvantage because he knows that B will have to bail him out and he sees B as inferior. Second, and more controversially, A can treat B as inferior even if he brings about his own disadvantage innocently, so to speak (i.e. without seeing B as inferior), but if his demand for compensation that stems from seeing B as inferior affects B's proper access to resources.

I am far from claiming, however, that every time B is forced to bail A out, B's proper access to resources is affected. B's proper access is affected only if he would be allowed not to bail A out after B's entitlements were protected from the reach of those who do not

treat B as a moral equal. This is compatible with B being required to assist A in numerous scenarios – after all, even in a world with ultimate control not every instance of assistance to A would be characterised as an inegalitarian subsidy. Nonetheless some would be (think back to the early example of A overspending on caviar) and this idea carries over into the world without ultimate control because to require B to always bail A out would again amount to making all of B’s entitlements conditional upon A’s willingness to treat B as a moral equal.

The thought that a person can treat others as inferior in depriving them of proper access to resources even when the person in question does not, in essence, directly violate their entitlements is absolutely crucial. It explains how wanting to uphold equality of moral status can lead to attributions of consequential responsibility in situations where one’s actions had a direct impact only on one’s own access to resources, as long as one’s actions, in the way described above, had an indirect impact on other’s proper access to resources. It thereby shows that attributions of responsibility are not limited to cases where someone has actually treated another person as inferior since it is enough that such treatment would occur had responsibility not been attributed. Of course, some will consider even this conditional requirement of inferior treatment too strong and I address this problem in section 6. The important point to take away from the discussion so far is that responsibility can in principle be attributed in at least some cases where the only victim of someone’s actions is the agent in question.

It could be objected at this point, however, that even if I am correct in suggesting that attributions of responsibility are a way of upholding equality of moral status, they are not always the only way to uphold it. Let us agree, the objection begins, that to respect B's equal moral status, B must be compensated in case his proper access to resources is diminished by someone treating him as inferior. True, in two people societies the compensation would have to come from A. But, the objection continues, why not make everyone (other than B) carry the costs of compensating B in societies consisting of more than two people? It would then be possible both to compensate B and to avoid holding A fully liable for the costs his actions impose on B, and thereby get much closer to achieving equality of outcomes than if full liability were assigned to A alone.

What this objection correctly shows is that, in societies with more than two people, it might sometimes be possible to compensate B without holding A fully liable. But this possibility cannot altogether eliminate the need to hold A fully liable for many of his actions. For notice that as soon as members of a given society realise that there is a general policy of splitting the costs of compensation between all of them, their inferior treatment of one person will also tend to manifest them seeing as inferior all those who have to share the resulting compensatory burden. This is because the more aware they become of the impact their conduct has on third parties the more their conduct reflects the attitude they have towards these third parties. For an illustration, from a rather different walk of life, of how the treatment of one person can manifest an attitude towards some third party, consider how having an affair with a married woman would often reveal not only someone's attitude towards that woman but also this person's view on how he can

treat that woman's spouse. And of course treating as inferior all those who must share the burdens of compensation triggered by one's initial conduct would then in turn trigger the need for additional compensation just in case it would diminish their proper access to resources (as it often inevitably would unless we assumed, implausibly, that the society in question was composed only of altruistic individuals who wanted to make all their resources available to reduce the compensatory burden that would otherwise just fall on A). In the end, therefore, A would often be unable to escape being held fully liable for the costs of whatever he took from B, since even if he did not compensate B he would have to compensate those who compensated B.

I do not want to deny that it is possible for A to treat B as inferior without at the same time manifesting a superior attitude towards those who will share the burden of compensation. However, even if it is sometimes possible to uphold equality of moral status without assigning full liability to those who mistreat others, there will also be cases where assigning such liability is necessary. Once more, we cannot escape the conclusion that a society that adopted the SOS (or something along the lines suggested by the objection which approximates the SOS) could not deliver what equality of moral status requires.

To summarize then, I have argued in this section that the requirements of equality of moral status are violated when people's proper access to resources is allowed to be diminished simply because others treated them as inferior. Moreover, I have argued that this will be the precise result of adopting the SOS. Of course, I have not yet explained

why egalitarians must prioritise the demands of equality of moral status over those of the SOS. This is what I turn to next.

5. The Priority of Equality of Moral Status over Equality of Outcomes

Since we cannot both always secure equal outcomes and uphold equality of moral status we must choose between them. Which of the two egalitarian ideals should be given priority? Let me tackle this question by rephrasing it in terms of a concern with fairness. It is unfair not to give to people what is owed to them on account of their equal moral status and it is unfair to allow people to end up disadvantaged due to luck. Can we compare these different types of unfairness? Of course anything that can be said here is doomed to be rather imprecise given the imprecise nature of our intuitions about fairness but since a lot rides on the answer, let's see what can be said.

I think that we should recognise the unfairness of violating the requirements of equal moral status as invariably more fundamental – that is as one whose removal is to be prioritised – than that involved in rejecting equality of outcomes. To see why recall the claim made in section 4 that seeing someone as a person means recognising that this fact places constraints on what can be done to them by others and that the idea of moral status can be used to express this truth. If this is so, then denying someone what equality of moral status between persons requires means denying that being the status of a full person. Moreover, since the concept of personhood is best understood as binary, it means denying that being the status of a person *tout court*. Admittedly, any claim that it is more

unfair to be denied the status of a (full) person than it is to end up worse off due to factors beyond one's control is not amenable to philosophical proof. Nonetheless it rests on the plausible view that, at least for the purposes of assessment of what can be done to someone (which is, after all, the purpose of any theory of justice), the most fundamental interest a person has is to be recognized as a person rather than anything less than a person. This is so if only because if one is a person, being recognised as such maximises the chance of an accurate assessment of what can be done to that person. After all, denying what equal moral status requires allows how one fares in life to be determined by people who refuse to recognise that one's existence is as normatively significant as it really is.

There are in fact two additional reasons to accept the conclusion that upholding equality of moral status should be prioritised over securing equality of outcomes. First, it is likely the case that any concerns with arbitrary inequalities among a group of beings only make sense once we assume that all these beings have relatively high moral status. This would explain why we may worry about arbitrariness affecting human lives but not the lives of fish: only humans are usually considered to have moral status that is high enough to make us care about how they fare in life across multiple dimensions. If this is the case then protecting that moral status for each of them is normatively primary to securing equality of outcomes between them. Second, even if worries about arbitrariness between persons are freestanding and do not presuppose that all persons enjoy high moral status, it is likely that whatever can be plausibly thought to ground the moral status of persons will turn out to be more important than the absence of arbitrary differentiation. After all,

among the plausible candidates for the grounding the moral status of people are: the ability to reason, consciousness, emotional life and other similarly weighty properties of persons. We have far clearer and stronger intuitions about the importance of any of these than we have about the importance of eliminating arbitrary disadvantage.

If this is correct then the SOS, in striving to eliminate one unfairness, creates an even greater one. But some may object to this claim on the grounds that I have not adequately portrayed the unfairness present in holding people responsible for the luck that makes them fall short of the normative requirements on their conduct. The situation that A faces, it could be argued, is analogous to the situation of a soldier who is set an impossible task by a sadistic officer – for example, to run ten kilometres in ten minutes – and told that grave consequences (corporal punishment) will follow if he does not fulfil it.²² Could not A from the examples above object that upholding equality of moral status is similarly unfair to him: it places a burden on A on the basis that he did not live up to the requirement of treating others as moral equals even though it is not ultimately up to him if he can fulfil this requirement. It seems to me, however, that in so far as we see the situation of the soldier as gravely unfair it is because we see the officer as sadistic and imposing unjustified punishment on his soldiers – I have tried to show, however, that in the case of A and B the burdens imposed on A are justified (as far as egalitarian justice is concerned) in the light of the realization that not to impose them on A would involve an even greater unfairness towards B. I certainly do not want to deny that the SOS can exert some pull over one's egalitarian intuitions: after all, it prevents differentiation between people on the basis of factors that they have no ultimate control over. Crucially, however,

my claim is that the pull of egalitarian intuitions against the SOS outweighs the pull of intuitions for it.

Armed with the above defence of why a lack of ultimate control cannot dislodge attributions of consequential responsibility, let me in this concluding section explore the range of attributions of consequential responsibility my argument allows me to justify.

6. The Range of Attributions of Responsibility

I began my defence of the egalitarianism of consequential responsibility by focusing on a very narrow subset of possible scenarios in which, intuitively, we would want to hold people responsible: A was knowingly treating B as inferior in taking B's resources. I have tried to show, however, that if egalitarians accept that in such scenarios they must sometimes give up on equality of outcomes, then they should also accept that they must give up on equality of outcomes in a wider range of scenarios. For example, egalitarians would have to allow attributions of consequential responsibility even if A's inferior treatment of B was unselfconscious. For this reason, the agency that can be the basis for attributing consequential responsibility need not be deliberate: actions performed, for example, absent-mindedly or out of forgetfulness can also form such a basis. More importantly perhaps, egalitarians would have to allow attributions of consequential responsibility to A (assuming that A had no independent claim for compensation), even if A has not treated anyone as inferior but would have, had he not been held consequentially responsible for his disadvantage. Spending one's entire salary on shoes or leaving heating

at full blast and then hoping that someone else will pick up the bill will sometimes reflect an attitude of superiority towards others dressed specifically in the belief that one is special; when this happens, my account will allow us to attribute consequential responsibility (assuming that the big spenders have no independent claim for compensation). Of course, as already mentioned earlier, there will be many cases where it will be hard or impossible to find out if one's carelessness and imprudence or one's demands for rescue stem from seeing others as inferior and I accept that this severely limits the applicability of my account as a guide to policy. However, policy design is not the only reason to explore the relationship between equality and responsibility.

This still leaves us with a worry and a question. The worry is that despite what has just been said, the range of attributions of responsibility defended here is unacceptably narrow because the requirement of (potential) inferior treatment is too strong. I will return to this worry at the end of this section. First, however, let me tackle the following question: does my defence of responsibility allow egalitarians to attribute responsibility not only for disadvantages (burdensome consequential responsibility) but also for advantages (beneficial consequential responsibility)?

6.1. Responsibility for Advantages

It might seem that my argument for attributions of consequential responsibility can work only in the case of burdensome consequential responsibility, and does not show that an egalitarian can consider as just advantages that people brought about. True, justifying

burdensome consequential responsibility requires in some sense to be able also to justify some people enjoying advantages. This is because, for burdensome consequential responsibility to be possible, some people must be allowed to enjoy relative advantage, since if no one enjoyed advantageous situations, no one could enjoy disadvantageous ones either. Nonetheless, burdensome consequential responsibility is perfectly compatible with there being no room in the world for people to improve their situation through the exercise of agency: for a person can enjoy an advantage over someone who wastes her resources while it is also the case that neither of them has the option to acquire, through their actions, any additional resources that would create or increase their advantage. For example, if I knock out my teeth and you keep yours you will enjoy an advantage but this situation is compatible with you nonetheless not being given the option to acquire a better set of teeth. So the question I am now raising is whether consequential responsibility can be attributed for advantages in the sense that egalitarians would not demand the redistribution of everything that a person produces or acquires for herself. If such beneficial responsibility cannot be attributed, then equality of opportunity in a world without ultimate control would amount to giving people equal initial shares of goods but never options to acquire some additional goods just for themselves and thereby improve their standing.

The arguments against giving people options to improve their standing should sound familiar by now so I will not rehearse them at length: it would be inequalitarian to allow some, for example, to earn more than others, on the basis that they work hard, if the fact that they work hard is itself a matter of luck.²³ However, if we assume that it is possible

for someone not to realise some opportunity she has simply because she thinks she can free-ride on others due to their inferior status, it will be wrong for egalitarians to demand that all advantage secured by others must be redistributed to ensure equality of outcomes. It would be wrong, for example, to tell someone who wants to improve her diet, through planting the minimal amount of fruits and vegetables required to achieve this aim, that what she produces will be redistributed to ensure all have the same amount of garden produce even when the only reason others do not tend to their gardens is that they think they can just free-ride on her.²⁴ In situations where one's advantage stems simply from the fact that others chose not to pursue their opportunities because they thought of themselves as superior, there is nothing inequalitarian about this advantage. As before, it would violate the demands of equality of moral status not to allow such beneficial consequential responsibility, since equality of moral status disallows situations in which one's proper access to resources is made hostage to the fact that others do not want to realise opportunities open to them because they see that person as inferior.

Of course, it does not follow from the above that an egalitarian must maximise the provision of options to improve one's life to all. Indeed, I am merely advocating that the extent to which one can improve one's life should not be conditional upon whether others want to block a given opportunity because they see its potential recipient as a being with lesser moral status (and otherwise have no claim that such opportunities be blocked). Beneficial consequential responsibility can then be justified even for a world without ultimate control and, moreover, justified in the light of the same considerations as those pertaining to burdensome consequential responsibility.

6.2. The Limits of the Range of Attributions of Responsibility

A worry remains, however, whether the range of attributions of consequential responsibility defended here corresponds to our intuitions about when it is appropriate to attribute consequential responsibility to people. It might seem that I am still only able to justify a relatively narrow subset of otherwise intuitive attributions. There are, it would seem, two types of cases where my account most strikingly departs from some every-day intuitions. In both cases the mismatch is due to the fact that responsibility cannot be attributed in the absence of (at least potential) inferior treatment.

The first case concerns situations in which someone loses a resource without treating anyone as inferior and where the resource can be replaced without triggering such treatment. Imagine, for example that, however implausibly, A has left her uninsured car in a place where it was likely to be ruined by the forces of nature. It did get ruined, but it so happens that we have a spare car that no one else happens to want or have any entitlement to. If we give the car to A no one will be treated as inferior. Upon my account, there is therefore no egalitarian reason to hold A consequentially responsible for the loss of her car, and indeed there is an egalitarian reason not to hold her responsible. Surely, however, the sceptic argues, although A may be allowed to appropriate the car, A has no claim of egalitarian justice to the car (even if charity requires she should get it) and could thus be held consequentially responsible for no longer having a car.

The second case concerns situations in which someone deprives herself or another of some resource but does so innocently in the sense that neither the initial action nor any acceptance of compensation can be classified as treating anyone as inferior. For example a person mistakenly believes that all of some X should go to him rather than be split between him and his neighbour because this is what he has been reliably told by a third party. Or a person spends her resources on some project that leaves her badly-off and genuinely believes that she is entitled to some compensation without seeing anyone as inferior, just as she would be had she been born disabled. Upon my account the woman would have to be compensated and the man from the first scenario would not be required to return half of X to his neighbour if it would leave him worse off. Surely, however, the sceptic argues, these are unacceptable conclusions. Consequential responsibility, the sceptic concludes, is more widespread and simpler – since it does not require judging if inferior treatment was present – than my account suggests.

Notice, however, that in defending the conclusion that goes against my account the sceptic simply presupposes what I have tried to argue for here, namely that one's disadvantage in a world without ultimate control does not offer us a decisive egalitarian reason to remove this disadvantage. This is why the sceptic can stipulate that the ex-owner of the car has no claim to have his disadvantage removed and nor does the woman in the example above. The sceptic thereby rejects the starting assumption of my discussion here, which is that it is unfair to attribute differential responsibility to people who do not ultimately control their actions. I have argued that this fact of unfairness does not suffice to dislodge attributions of responsibility when, in the absence of such

attributions, people's proper access to resources would be determined by the fact that others treat them as inferior. The sceptic does not even recognise the need for any such argument. To the extent that the sceptic's account is simpler, therefore, this is because it fails to recognise as valid the biggest difficulty for the possibility of consequential responsibility, namely the fact that it requires differentiating between people on the basis of differences over which they have no ultimate control. The sceptic's account may therefore also map better onto many of our every-day life intuitions about holding people consequentially responsible but this is, I propose, not a good reason to reject my account. Indeed, we have good reasons to doubt if all our every-day intuitions about responsibility (a) reflect the fact of the unfairness of arbitrary differentiation between people and (b) can be reconciled into one coherent set of principles without letting go of any of them. And while the radical egalitarianism aimed against arbitrary disadvantage should be saved from some of its purported counterintuitive conclusions, it should not be saved from all of them if it is to remain radical.²⁵

I believe, therefore, contrary to the sceptic, that when the conditions for attribution of consequential responsibility identified here are not met, consequential responsibility should not be attributed. This does not mean that people cannot be made to bear disadvantages in such cases but justifications of such situations will have to reach beyond reasons to do with the involvement of one's agency in bringing a given disadvantage about to reasons, for example, relating to efficiency. If my account of what type of agency is necessary before consequential responsibility can be attributed allows for only a narrow range of attributions of consequential responsibility this is because to expand

such attributions beyond this range is to treat people in a way that departs from the requirements of egalitarian justice.

Conclusion

Accepting intuitions about the inegalitarianism of differentiating between people on the basis of agency they do not ultimately control does not make it impossible for egalitarians to differentiate nonetheless between people on the basis of their agency. This is because the ideal of equal moral status should underpin egalitarianism and this ideal cannot be upheld unless agency expressive of reasons is recognised as a valid basis for holding people responsible at least sometimes for what they do and how they fare in life. Even in a world in which people are not ultimately in control of who they are, people can be expected and required to adjust their conduct to take account of other people's interest-based claims on scarce resources. The fact that luck is interwoven into one's agency does not disqualify agency as a fair basis on which people can be held responsible for a range of burdens and benefits they acquire as they lead their lives. Remembering that luck has made us who we are – or that in Scanlonian and Biblical terms God's grace, or the lack of it, has led us on our way – does not preclude holding people responsible for how who they are affects who others can be.

¹ [Omitted].

² T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 294.

³ People can be said to lack ultimate control when they lack free will but I do not want to take a stance here on whether a world without ultimate control must be deterministic. For a brief statement of the view that the threat to attributions of responsibility may persist even if determinism is false see Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 249-50.

⁴ Many valuable arguments exist but I have found the following two most illuminating: P.F. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment', in *Free Will*, second edition, edited by Gary Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 72-94 and R. Jay Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994). I refer here and throughout the paper to arguments aiming to provide more than an instrumental defence of holding people responsible of the type that, for example, we should hold people responsible because of the desirable incentives it creates.

⁵ The type of egalitarianism that finds it hardest to incorporate the idea of responsibility without ultimate control is egalitarianism concerned with fairness rather than with ending oppression or promoting solidarity and for that reason this is the type of egalitarianism I focus on here. At the same time, in order to focus on the problem lack of ultimate control raises for such egalitarians, I abstract away from problems raised by the presence of luck in how actions (playing with matches) translate into outcomes (a burnt down house).

⁶ The fact that there is, at least on the face of it, something problematic about allowing actions (choices) that are ultimately due to luck to determine whether one ends up disadvantaged is captured by Scheffler when he declares that '...unless genuine choices (both wise and unwise) are conceived of as metaphysically distinctive in a way that makes them privileged indicators of true identities or ultimate worth, it is obscure why they should have the kind of across-the-board, make-or-break significance that luck egalitarianism assigns to them.' Samuel Scheffler, 'Choice, Circumstance, and the Value of Equality', *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 4 (2005): 5-28, 13.

⁷ My acceptance of this intuition is one important factor that differentiates my defence of holding people consequentially responsible from the much-discussed defences offered by Ronald Dworkin and T. M. Scanlon. See Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), chapter 7 and Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, chapter 6.

⁸ Resources will also be referred to as goods and the category is meant to include opportunities or powers. Resources are assumed throughout to be scarce so that Humean 'circumstances of justice' apply: David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by T. L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 83-9.

⁹ I believe that it would not be troubling from the perspective of egalitarian justice even if A ended up in a thoroughly bad situation. But, for the sake of those who disagree, I am happy to assume here that A does not end up in a thoroughly bad situation. I do assume, however, that A really does end up worse off than B all things considered: for example, even taking into account the enormous joy A experienced eating caviar, he ends up worse off overall than B.

¹⁰ The view that people cannot be held responsible in a world without ultimate control is most familiar from the literature on moral responsibility. However, the view is also affirmed or entertained in relation to what I call here consequential responsibility. For a tentative defence of the SOS see Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, *Deontology, Responsibility, and Equality* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2005), esp. 331-2 and Introduction and chapter 12. Consider also the following claim by G. A. Cohen: 'Equality of access to advantage is motivated by the idea that

differential advantage is unjust save where it reflects differences in genuine choice...on the part of relevant agents. The idea motivating equality of access to advantage does not...imply that there actually is such a thing as genuine choice. Instead, it implies that if there is no such thing—because, for example, “hard determinism” is true—then all differential advantage is unjust...’ G. A. Cohen, ‘Equality of What? On Welfare, Goods, and Capabilities’ in *The Quality of Life*, edited by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Oxford University Press, 1993): 9-29, 28. For further remarks by G. A. Cohen on the possibility of the rightness of the SOS, see also his ‘Expensive Tastes Rides Again’ in *Dworkin and His Critics*, edited by Justine Burley (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004): 3-29, 22, and for his suggestion that causal determination may be compatible with responsibility see ‘Why Not Socialism?’ in *Democratic Equality*, edited by Edward Broadbent (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001): 58-78, 76, fn. 14. Richard Arneson accepts that a similar view to the SOS might prove to be correct: in the absence of ultimate control, agency cannot be the basis upon which to justify non-instrumentally departing from a prioritarian distribution of whatever is accepted as the currency of justice. This view is only ‘similar’ since the relevant distribution is prioritarian, but Arneson himself considers a prioritarian distribution to be a version of egalitarian distribution. See his ‘Luck Egalitarianism Interpreted and Defended’, forthcoming. Arneson does not argue that this view must be right because he thinks that lack of ultimate control may turn out to be compatible with moral responsibility and the latter could ground attributions of consequential responsibility. While Arneson records his agnosticism on the issue, I argue here why the SOS and its variants should be rejected. Of course, there might be other reasons to reject the SOS but these will not concern me here.

¹¹ To put my cards on the table, my overall argument in this paper requires that there be an algorithm according to which X has to be divided between A and B so that it is not up to the parties to decide how much X to claim for themselves. Here, for simplicity, I only focus on an equal division algorithm. But my argument for consequential responsibility would work for unequal division algorithms as well.

¹² Upholding equality of moral status is what we might expect of most, if not all, contemporary theories of justice. It would explain why, as suggested by Will Kymlicka, every recent theory of justice could be seen as egalitarian in some sense, namely in the sense that they respect everyone’s equal moral status: Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3-4.

¹³ It is also possible for some to treat others as superior. Such treatment is problematic for an egalitarian when it means that those who are treated as superior end up with more than others for the simple reason that they end up advantaged due to luck. Calls for redistribution in this case, however, do not require holding the agent who treated others as superior responsible. An interesting situation arises, however, when a person treats everyone but himself as equally superior (in such cases her actions do not stem from an attitude of superiority towards anyone but rather an attitude of reverence towards someone else). Even if treating oneself as inferior is troubling for an egalitarian, I will side-step this problem since it opens up a new set of issues that I cannot deal with here, the most important one of which is whether fairness requires that a person who has disadvantaged herself through self-oriented inferior treatment must compensate herself for the disadvantage.

¹⁴ [Omitted].

¹⁵ I focus here on agency expressed through conduct but I do not wish to signal that this is the most significant way of expressing agency. There are many sophisticated accounts, primarily in

the literature on moral responsibility, of what reason-responsiveness involves (see, for example, Fisher and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*, Cambridge University Press, 1998). Since I only need the idea that in a world without ultimate control actions can express certain normative reasons, I will not discuss any of these models here. Specifically, notice that I am not interested in making agency expressive of reasons bear the full burden of attributions of moral responsibility.

¹⁶ For one interesting, if controversial, example of such cases see, for instance, C. Fine and J. Kennett, 'Mental Impairment, Moral Understanding and Criminal Responsibility: Psychopathy and the Purposes of Punishment', *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 27 (2004): 425-43.

¹⁷ Support for a similar view regarding agency at time T1 and T2, as far as agency that can give rise to attributions of moral responsibility is concerned, can be found in A. M. Smith, 'Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life', *Ethics* 115 (2005): 236-71.

¹⁸ As Bernard Williams has put it, to the claim that 'all men are equal ... it might be objected that...if all that the statement does is to remind us that men are men, it does not do very much, and in particular does less than its proponents in political argument have wanted it to do.' Bernard Williams, 'The Idea of Equality' in his *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956-72* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973): 230-49, 230. Equality of moral status is clearly reminiscent of Dworkinian equality of concern. Dworkin has famously elaborated distributive equality as an expression of equality of concern, thereby suggesting that any conflict between distributive equality and equality of concern must be resolved in favour of the latter, or else the former could not express the latter (Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, 1). I do not use his argument in support of my own, however, for some may object that Dworkin's understanding of the idea of equal concern is sufficiently different from my understanding of equality of moral status and so, even if Dworkin is right that equality of concern underpins distributive equality, it does not follow that equality of moral status does. This is so, especially, given that the role the concept of equality of concern plays in Dworkin's theory makes the concept very hard to pin down: the answer to what equal concern means consists in elaborating the entire theory. Indeed to the very question of the meaning of equality of concern Dworkin's reply is that 'there is no straightforward or uncontroversial answer...' (Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, 2). Moreover, in contrast to Dworkin's discussion of equality of concern, I do not think that any specific distributive ideal can be derived from the idea of equal moral status - what the idea of equal moral status does is merely place constraints on the range of acceptable distributions.

¹⁹ Are requirements of equality of moral status not violated, one may ask, when people's proper access to resources is allowed to be diminished tout court? If I force your door because I reasonably and innocently believe that it is my door, I am not thereby treating you as inferior, but does not equality of moral status require that I am then made to compensate you in any case? I side-step this question in this paper by focusing on what equality of moral status requires at the minimum. It may turn out that upholding equality of moral status requires more than I have argued for here. However, since a basic argument for attributions of consequential responsibility can be made without filling in the ideal of equal moral status in detail I do not fill it in to avoid the impression that consequential responsibility could only be attributed upon certain controversial renderings of what equality of moral status involves.

²⁰ Kant is, of course, the most famous champion of this idea, although for him the respect we owe to persons on account of their moral status goes beyond the modest requirements I have outlined above. As Kant sees it '...rational beings are called *persons* because their nature already marks

them out as an end in itself, that is, as something that may not be used merely as means, and hence so far *limits all choice...*' Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Mary Gregor (ed. and trans.), Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1785], 37, italics mine. The idea that personhood offers one a moral protection is well-captured by Darwall when he argues that to see someone as a person is to recognise that this fact places moral constraints on behaviour towards them (Stephen Darwall, 'Two Kinds of Respect', *Ethics* 88 (1977): 36-49, esp. 37-41 and 45-7). Of course, I have in the above discussion taken for granted that the idea of people having moral status is applicable to a world without ultimate control. This is not an uncontroversial assumption since it is possible – if far from obvious – that normative categories only make sense against the background assumption of a world populated with agents who enjoy free will. Notice, however, that there is no need for me to defend this assumption in my argument against the SOS since the SOS itself must assume that normative categories makes sense in a world without ultimate control if it is to express the view that it is unfair to differentiate between people on the basis of factors they did not ultimately control.

²¹ When B is not forced to give up his resources but does so voluntarily then his resulting situation is not, on plausible assumptions, problematic for egalitarians. Of course when A accepts some X that is taken from B because of A's disadvantage, A is not the only person who deprives B of his resources. This means that the burden of compensating B may need to be shared between A and the others.

²² [Omitted].

²³ As Rawls famously put it: 'it seems clear that the effort a person is willing to make is influenced by his natural abilities and skills and the alternatives open to him. The better endowed are more likely, other things equal, to strive conscientiously, and there seems to be no way to discount for their greater good fortune.' John Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1971]), 274. Rawls was not suggesting, however, that people should not be given opportunities to improve their standing.

²⁴ Through all my examples, I consider possibilities rather than make sociological generalizations. I do not mean to signal that as a rule those who refuse to engage in some productive activity do it because they see others as inferior. As Jonathan Wolff points out, given the hardship that unemployment brings, we have good reasons to suppose that the unemployed, for one, are not normally unemployed out of choice. Jonathan Wolff, 'Training, Perfectionism and Fairness', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 21 (2004): 285-95, 291.

²⁵ There is an additional reason to that can be offered to throw doubt on the sceptic's conclusion with regard to the first case – the case of the damaged car. The charge that my account of consequential responsibility fails to provide us with an intuitive picture of responsibility attributions in a world in which disadvantages, material disadvantages at that, can be removed without taking resources from those who have a stronger claim on them, relies on the controversial premise that we can trust our intuitions to tell us what attributions of responsibility should look like in a world characterised by abundance. But would it be wise? It seems likely that our intuitions have been fine-tuned to serve us well in a world characterised by evident scarcity. At the very least, therefore, the seeming counterintuitiveness of my account for a world characterised by abundance may point just as much to the need to revise our intuitions as to the need to revise my account.