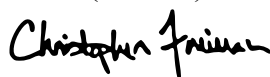Exploring Moral Saints

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from
William & Mary
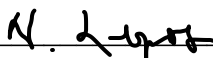

by

Ruyu (Evelyn) Wang

Accepted for _____Honors_____
                    (Honors)

Christopher Freiman
_____
Christopher Freiman, Director

N. Lemos
_____
Noah Lemos

Reya Farber
_____
Reya Farber

Williamsburg, VA
December 7, 2022

Exploring Moral Saints

Ruyu (Evelyn) Wang

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In "Saints and Heroes," J. O. Urmson (1958) defines moral saints by reference to their supererogatory actions. He believes that saintly actions are praiseworthy but not obligatory. However, Andrew Flescher (2003) and Tom Dougherty (2017) argue that people have duties to improve themselves morally and to increase how much they sacrifice for others gradually. In this paper, I will propose an Aristotelian-inspired definition of "saint" and discuss the moral duties of saints and ordinary people (i.e., people who are not saints) based on Dougherty's dynamic view of beneficence. I hold that ordinary people have *prima facie* duties to become saints, although not everyone has an all-things-considered duty to do so. For the few people with all-things-considered duties to become saints, failing these duties can be morally wrong yet not blameworthy. In many cases, ordinary people like us lack the standing to blame them.

In Chapter 2, I discuss some definitions of "saint" from the topical literature. I focus on the views of Urmson and Susan Wolf (1982) before concluding that neither definition is satisfactory. I propose an Aristotelian-inspired definition of "saint": to be a saint is to possess extraordinary moral virtues and to consistently manifest these virtues in actions. The manifestation of virtues requires saints to perform morally good actions for morally good reasons under the guidance of moral knowledge. In Chapter 3, I suggest that saints generally believe that saintly deeds are their duties. I also argue that ordinary people have *prima facie* duties to become saints. In Chapter 4, I discuss what all-things-considered duties ordinary people have compared with saints, by introducing the views of Flescher and Dougherty. I bring together their views and the Aristotelian-inspired definition of "saint" and conclude that Urmson's and Wolf's views neglect saints' essence—their virtues—and the process of moral development. In Chapter 5, I

argue that wrongness and blameworthiness are separable. Although some ordinary people have

duties to become saints, they may be excused from blame if they fail.

Chapter 2: Defining "Saint"

Intuitively, a saint[1] is a person with exceptional moral worth. One wonders, however, what exactly such a person looks like. In attempting to answer this question, I first discuss Urmson's and Wolf's views on sainthood: both accounts are *action*-focused. I shall then argue that an *agent*-focused account is more appropriate. We must invoke the notion of *virtues* to make sense of sainthood. I then propose an Aristotelian-inspired account of sainthood which centers saintly moral virtues.

2.1 Urmson's and Wolf's Accounts

Urmson speaks of both saints and heroes. He considers saintly and heroic actions to refute the conventional tripartite categorization of actions into morally permissible (i.e., morally indifferent), obligatory, and impermissible actions. Urmson argues that saints and heroes perform actions of a fourth type that are praiseworthy but not obligatory: actions beyond people's duties (now called supererogatory actions).[2] Urmson thus defines "saint" as someone who regularly performs their duty when most people would not or someone who acts far beyond the limits of their duty (1958, 201).[3] Like most philosophers, I will focus on saints who act beyond their duties. Consider the following hypothetical scenario:

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[1] By "saint," I am referring specifically to a (secular) moral saint. Although saints are widely discussed in religious contexts, I shall assume that moral saints need not be religious.

[2] In this paper, supererogatory actions refer solely to saintly actions. Other categories of supererogatory actions— e.g., forgiving, congratulating, and gift-giving—fall outside the scope of this paper.

[3] Urmson originally categorized saints into three types:

    1.   Someone who regularly performs their duty in contexts where inclination, desire, or self-interest would lead most people not to, and does so through exercising supernormal self-control.

Doctor: Dr. Good is a medical doctor whose job is to help sick people in her city. Over and above that, she volunteers to join a depleted medical force helping sick people in another city where an epidemic is raging.[4]

Dr. Good's duty is only to help patients in her city; risking her life to help patients in another city is much more than what is morally required of her. On Urmson's account, Dr. Good satisfies the criterion of sainthood by performing supererogatory actions far beyond her duty.

Urmson's definition of "saint" is solely based on people's actions. He does not consider motives (why people perform those actions), nor does he consider people's character traits or what virtues or vices they may have. Dr. Good is a saint as long as she goes far beyond the requirements of her job. It does not matter what her reasons are for doing so or what traits she has. Performing supererogatory actions, in and of itself, can make someone a saint.

Wolf also puts forward an action-focused account of sainthood: she defines "saint" as *a person whose every action is as morally good as possible* (1982, 419). Wolf considers the overall moral worth of every action performed throughout a person's life. Performing some saintly actions is not sufficient for someone to qualify as a saint. However, performing one unsaintly immoral action may discount someone from sainthood. Even if Dr. Good helps sick people in another city, she cannot be a saint if she also happens to once torture animals for fun. This is because torturing animals for fun is so immoral that Dr. Good's overall actions cannot be as morally good as possible, and she is thereby disqualified from sainthood.

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2. Someone who regularly performs their duty in contexts where inclination, desire, or self-interest would lead most people not to, and does so without effort.
3. Someone who performs acts that are far beyond the limits of their duty (whether by controlling contrary inclinations, desires, or self-interests or by doing so without effort).

He calls the first two types "minor saints" and the third type saints "par excellence."

[4] Adopted from Urmson (1958, 200).

My concern with both Urmson's and Wolf's action-focused accounts is that they only capture part of our conception of saints. Almost by definition, "saint" describes a *person*, not only a set of their *actions*. In Robert Louden's words, "saint" is an "agent term," while "saintly action" is an "act term" (1998, 362).[5] Being a saint amounts to more than behaving in a saintly manner. When we ask, "what kind of person is a saint?" we are asking what qualities or character traits a person must possess to qualify as a saint. In Aristotelian terms, we are asking what *virtues* they have in addition to what actions they perform or have performed. Saintly actions are "downstream" from saintly virtues. If this is the case, then our primary focus should be on what it is like to be a saintly *person*.

Contra Urmson and Wolf, *moral virtues*, rather than actions, seem to be definitive of what it means to be a saint. Moral virtues lead a saint to *will what is good*. A saint must be benevolent and fair-minded; they cannot be unjust, unfair, or evil. Lacking moral virtues, e.g., kindness, will disqualify someone from sainthood. This is the case even if that person performs saintly actions (perhaps out of sheer luck or evil intention). If Dr. Good somehow takes pleasure from seeing people suffer and risks her life to help patients in another city only to satisfy that twisted desire, she appears perverted instead of saint-like. Even though the same action—helping patients—is performed as before, her evil motive reveals a lack of kindness and disqualifies her from sainthood. Thus, I think a more reasonable interpretation of Urmson's and Wolf's action-focused accounts is to view saintly actions as necessary but not sufficient for sainthood, as a person's moral worth cannot be determined solely by the value of their actions.

If the above is correct, a proper account of sainthood should entail that saints devote their lives to performing good actions because they possess extraordinary moral virtues. These virtues

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[5] See also Haji (2015).

lead them to perform moral actions and prevent them from having significant moral flaws. In sum, being a saint is not simply about performing saintly actions—the moral worth of actions depends on the saint's moral virtues. Therefore, Urmson's and Wolf's action-focused accounts are not satisfactory as they do not capture this crucial feature of sainthood: it is about being a person with extraordinary moral virtues that result in their extraordinary overall moral worth.

2.2 Redefining "Saint": an Aristotelian-Inspired Definition[6]

If my arguments above are correct, then reference to extraordinary moral virtues is key to formulating a cogent account of sainthood. Yet, possessing moral virtues is not sufficient for sainthood, as Urmson and Wolf, nevertheless, correctly point out the importance of saintly actions. The emphasis on agent terms and virtues does not entail that actions are not necessary for sainthood. In Aristotle's view, ethics is a kind of practical science. He believes that "knowing about virtue is not enough, but we must also try to possess and exercise virtue" (1179b). Moreover, practices of performing morally good actions is a possible way of acquiring virtues, though perhaps not the only way, as Aristotole holds that, "Virtues, […], we acquire, just as we acquire crafts, by having first performed the actions" (1003a). We can become more virtuous through the practice of repeatedly performing certain virtuous actions.

Moral virtues give saints the good will to help others, but cannot guarantee their success in doing so. It would be odd to call Dr. Good a saint if she wants to help sick people, but carelessly (or unluckily) uses the wrong medicine many times, thereby doing more harm than

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[6] In this paper, I call my definition "Aristotelian-inspired" because it departs from how Aristotle originally discusses virtues in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Aristotle has never mentioned "moral knowledge." See Aristotle (2019).

good. A person who has moral virtues and wills the good but hardly (successfully) performs any good action cannot qualify as a saint, no matter how kind they are deep down in their heart. A saint must have the competence for and succeed in performing saintly actions that manifest their virtues.

As such, I propose that saints must meet the following conditions:

C1: Possess extraordinary moral virtues.

C2: Consistently manifest these virtues in actions.

To manifest virtues in actions, the actions performed must be morally good, and the motives behind them must also be good (as discussed in Chapter 1). Let us take the case of Dr. Good again. Dr. Good possesses moral virtues that give her the will to help patients in another city. To manifest these virtues in her actions, she needs to find the means to succeed in her goal—actions that can lead to her intended good consequences. Hence, she needs to know what actions can do good to others and what reasons are morally good to act upon to prevent her good will from being misled or misused. Inspired by Julia Markovits (2012), I thus conclude that, *to manifest moral virtues in actions, a person must perform morally good actions for morally good reasons*.[7] Hence, I revise C2 to the following:

C2': Consistently manifest these (moral) virtues in actions by performing morally good actions for morally good reasons.

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[7] I will later argue that these good actions are morally required of saints. So, what appears morally good to us is really morally required (i.e., right) for saints. I use the term "good" here to describe saints' actions from the perspectives of ordinary people like us who currently are not morally required to perform those actions. Although my view is influenced by Markovits' definition of "saint," I chose not to discuss it further due to the limited scope of this paper. She defines "saint" as "someone who always acts rightly, and always for all of the right-making reasons" (2012, 301). Her definition is action-focused, while I believe the value of acting rightly for the right reasons depends upon the possession and manifestation of moral virtues and knowledge. Thus, I think my definition of "saint" includes her conception of "sage," to some extent (2012, 307).

I shall now argue that satisfying C2' is still not enough. A saint must possess a fair amount of *moral knowledge*—i.e., *knowledge about what is good*—that guides them to perform good actions for good reasons.[8] Moral knowledge guides the saints to discern actions to pursue and reasons to act upon and enables them to know what morality requires of them.

One cannot be a saint without a fair amount of moral knowledge. Suppose someone has moral virtues that make them will the good, but lacks moral knowledge that makes them identify the good. If they believe something is good, they may try to achieve it, but they cannot independently generate warranted beliefs about what is good. Their beliefs may come from lucky guesses or others' testimony. For example, facing patients with severe symptoms unlikely to survive, Dr. Good wants to comfort them. So, she asks a senior doctor how to interact with them and follows her testimony without understanding why that is good. It nevertheless leads to good results. Facing multiple groups of people in need of her care, Dr. Good chooses to prioritize the right group. It turns out that her choice leads to the best result. But, she chooses so not because of contemplation or weighing reasons, but out of sheer luck. In these two scenarios, Dr. Good performs morally good actions (i.e., helping patients) for morally good reasons (i.e., out of care for her patients). However, without knowing why her specific actions are good, she resembles more of a confused kind person instead of a saint.

Suppose someone acts in a saintly manner because others whom they deem to be moral experts say it is good to do so. If they do not understand why that is good, they may be a good follower or practitioner, but we would not hold them up as a (secular) moral exemplar. The same goes for someone who acts in a saintly way out of sheer luck. Even if they perform good actions

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[8] I am assuming here that possessing moral virtues does not entail possessing moral knowledge. Nonetheless, my argument that moral knowledge is necessary for sainthood goes through either way.

to help others, we shall not call them a saint if they do not understand why their actions are good. Although a saint need not be a moral expert (e.g., a moral philosopher), they, at least, should possess a fair amount of moral knowledge to figure out independently what action to perform and understand why their particular action is good in a particular situation. They must be capable of independently contemplating what is morally required, and their saintly actions should result from the guidance of moral knowledge. Therefore, my final revision for C2 goes as follows:

> C2'': Consistently manifest these (moral) virtues in actions, by performing morally good actions for morally good reasons, under the guidance of moral knowledge.[9]

In sum, unlike Urmson's and Wolf's action-focused accounts, the Aristotelian-inspired agent-focused account interprets sainthood as consisting of two necessary parts—character (virtues and knowledge) and actions. Saints' moral virtues and knowledge lead them to perform saintly actions. Character is thus more fundamental to sainthood than actions. Nevertheless, as argued above, saintly character traits cannot guarantee the performance of actions; so, performing saintly actions is still necessary for someone to qualify as a saint. Therefore, the Aristotelian-inspired definition of "saint" is as follows: *to be a saint is to (1) possess extraordinary moral virtues and (2) consistently manifest these virtues in actions, by performing morally good actions for morally good reasons under the guidance of moral knowledge.*

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[9] A possible objection to C2'' involves what Bernard Williams calls "one thought too many" (1981, 18): a person who does good only because they have knowledge that it is good does not seem praiseworthy. E.g., Dr. Good should help her patients out of genuine care, not because she knows it is good to do so. In response, I think to have moral knowledge, saints need not always be actively contemplating morality. Dr. Good should not save people only while thinking that she is doing something good. She should save people because she cares about them. But, when she reflects on the matter, she must know that her action of care aligns with what is morally good. If she does not know it is good upon reflection, she seems to fall short of sainthood. As such, possessing moral knowledge that guides actions does not entail that the saint has "one thought too many" while performing good actions.

2.3 Potential Objections

A possible objection to C2'' involves what Bernard Williams calls "one thought too many" (1981, 18). Suppose someone called Ms. Love saves a loved one from a burning building. Later, reflecting on why she has done so, she does not say "because I love them," but "because it is morally good." Ms. Love would not be praiseworthy because having moral knowledge that it is morally good to save her loved one is not a proper reason for saving them. A person who does good only because they know that it is right is having "one thought too many." Michael Smith (1994) further states that people's moral concerns are (and should be) direct and non-derivative; they do (and should) help others because they care about others, not because they believe that it is morally good to do so. What makes Ms. Love's action heroic and praiseworthy is her direct and non-derivative motive: love for a loved one. As Smith argues, having one thought too many alienates Ms. Love from the ends at which she should aim and reveals a moral vice (1994, 75). Hence, in a similar vein, Dr. Good ought to cure patients because of genuine care for their lives and not because of derivative concerns about morality. However, emphasizing moral knowledge, it seems that C2'' falsely suggests that, to be a saint, she must help the patient because she knows it is morally good. Yet, moral motives alone, as Williams and Smith suggest, are not a legitimate source of genuinely saintly actions. Therefore, the Aristotelian-inspired definition is unsatisfactory by mistakenly making the saint having "one thought too many".

In response, it may be helpful to distinguish between acting and reflecting. Having "one thought too many" when *acting* may be problematic, but I am not convinced that "having one thought too many" when *reflecting* is. Having knowledge does not mean that one needs to actively think about that knowledge, as my knowledge that Paris is the capital of France does not

disappear when I am not thinking about Paris. Similarly, a saint's moral knowledge does not disappear when they are not contemplating morality. Acting for a morally *right* reason is not equivalent to acting for a *purely* moral reason. It can be morally right to act out of care without actively thinking about whether it is right to act in such a way. To have moral knowledge, saints need not always be actively contemplating morality. Instead, they merely need to hold true beliefs in the back of their mind that they can call on during reflection. Dr. Good does not, and should not, save people only while thinking that she is doing something morally right. She should save people because she cares about them. But, when she reflects on the matter, she can know that her actions of care align with what is morally right. This reflection involves drawing on moral knowledge. And, as mentioned, if someone lacks moral knowledge—if they do not know whether or not they have done the right thing—then they do not qualify for sainthood. As such, a saint can possess moral knowledge without suffering from "one thought too many."

Chapter 3: The Duties of Saints and Ordinary People

In this chapter, I discuss the duties of saints compared with those of ordinary people. Saints appear to think that altruistic actions are within the scope of their duties. For example, Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, devoted her life to charity. She believed that giving up material goods for others and living in poverty was her duty. We must, she said, "strip ourselves to help others."[10] Vanessa Carbonell considers John Weidner a saint (2009, 90). He put himself in danger, helping Jews escape during World War II. Like Day, he denied that he had done something extraordinary and claimed that he only had done his duty. Based on their testimony, saints believe that they have the duty to perform altruistic actions.[11]

Such a demanding view is contradictory to Urmson's conception of duty. Urmson is skeptical about whether we should take saints' testimony literally, and he thinks that altruistic actions go beyond saints' duties. Although saints may claim that they have the duty to perform altruistic actions, they are either mistaken or overly modest. According to Urmson, if one has the duty to perform saintly actions, then others can reasonably say to them that "it is your duty to do so" (1958, 203). But Urmson thinks nobody can reasonably say that to anyone, as that sounds too demanding, revealing that saintly actions are not within anyone's duty. Dr. Good may say to herself, "it is my duty to help others," but she cannot demand other doctors behave as she does. No one can say to a doctor that they are duty-bound to risk their life for others; that demands too much. Saints may not think saintly actions are optional for themselves, but given that no one can reasonably require others to perform them, such actions go beyond the call of duty. For Urmson,

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[10] See Flescher (2003, 3).
[11] These individuals might not fully satisfy my definition of "saint" as they may have hidden moral flaws. On my reading, they do nonetheless come very close to the moral ideal.

saints' testimony can, at best, be taken rhetorically to urge ordinary people toward moral improvement. At worst, saints are simply mistaken.

Urmson's view is, however, incompatible with the account of sainthood outlined in Chapter 2. As mentioned, saints possess a fair amount of moral knowledge that can be employed in contemplating the actions that they have performed, so they should be credible sources of their own moral duties. They have accurate beliefs about the requirements of morality, and likely know *for themselves* what is obligatory and supererogatory better than ordinary people do. Suppose that Dr. Good's co-worker Dr. Know falls sick. He says he needs to self-administer a medicine never used before for his special type of sickness. It seems reasonable for ordinary people to believe his testimony. Dr. Know has more medical knowledge and knows his own body better than ordinary people. Analogously, saints are, *ceteris paribus*, better moral guides than ordinary people as they possess more moral knowledge and likely know their own duties better. Hence, it is reasonable for ordinary people to trust saints' testimony more than their own judgments, at least when determining saints' duties.[12] If a saint claim that it is their duty to perform a specific action, then, contra Urmson, we should take that seriously. Therefore, following saints' testimony, altruistic actions may indeed be obligatory for them.

A further question relates to whether ordinary people are obliged to become saints. Philosophers have debated the extent to which ordinary people should make sacrifices for others in the way that saints do. Urmson believes that becoming saints is beyond our duty because saints are altruistic in a way that we cannot be (1958, 201). Wolf argues that being saintly is

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[12] Nevertheless, moral philosophers are (mostly) ordinary people, but they can feasibly possess as much, if not more, moral knowledge than saints. However, as philosophers have not reached consensus on what saints ought to do, I think it is reasonable to incorporate saints' testimony into the debate. That said, saints' testimony do not necessarily trump philosophical accounts, and saints do not necessarily always know better than ordinary people. Rather, my claim is that saints are in a better position to know *their own duty* than ordinary people, including philosophers.

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unhealthy for ordinary people; we should not devote ourselves solely to moral pursuits (1982, 424). However, Peter Singer has famously argued that we should devote everything that is not of comparative moral worth to helping others (1972, 231). A relevant fact is that many philosophers believe ordinary people do not have the duty to become saints but still hold saints as moral exemplars.[13] In contrast, such a belief seems self-contradictory to Christopher New, as he says, "it is hard to understand why saints and heroes are held up as paradigms of human virtue, if we are under no obligation whatsoever to try to do likewise" (1974, 183). In other words, if we hold saints up as moral exemplars, then we have some obligations to become like them.

I agree with New that ordinary people have, at least, *prima facie* duties to become saints. A *prima facie* duty is conditional. It is binding unless overridden by other duties that are more morally significant.[14] A *prima facie* duty that overrides other duties is an all-things-considered duty. We praise saints and heroes not only because they have done something extraordinary; our praise implicitly entails that we have *prima facie* duties to become like them. For example, we praise people who heroically save drowning children (at least partially) because we hope more people will be like them and act similarly. Ordinary people have *prima facie* duties to be as brave and kind. Similarly, praising saints implies that we have *prima facie* duties to be like them.

Some may claim that saints and ordinary people have different moral duties; they answer to different moral standards. Even if ordinary people praise saints, they are not obligated to become like them. Suppose that Ms. Ball is an excellent football player. Audiences watching one of Ms. Ball's football matches may praise her, but they are not obligated to become like her, for they do not play football. Becoming an excellent football player is a *prima facie* duty only for a

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[13] See Carbonell (2012), and Grigoletto (2018).
[14] Adopted from Ross (1930, 19–20).

professional football player. Analogously, the claim might go, being saintly is a duty only for a potential saint, for someone who pursues moral perfection as a "career" (e.g., a philanthropist or a nun). Ordinary people may have *prima facie* duties to become good people, but they are not obligated to go further and become saints.

However, if we are not obligated to become saints, then we should embrace ordinary people rather than saints as moral exemplars. Compare Dorothy Day with someone called Mr. Rich. Mr. Rich is generally a kind person who donates money occasionally, but he mostly lives a life of conventional enjoyment. If we believe that Mr. Rich's life is more suitable for ordinary people to pursue, then we should frame him as a moral exemplar rather than Dorothy Day. If a duty to aspire to sainthood is too extreme—if it is not within reach of ordinary people—then we should have rejected saints as moral exemplars.[15] However, we continue praising saints and holding them up as paragons of morality. We deem Dorothy Day more praiseworthy than Mr. Rich and hold her up as a moral exemplar. As such, ordinary people like Mr. Rich are not morally good enough, and we have *prima facie* duties to become like saints.

A problem remains, however, that all this may be too demanding. Saying that ordinary people must meet the standards of sainthood amounts to what Flescher calls a "tyrant's morality" (2003, 273)—it imposes an absolute standard on people without properly accounting for whether that is practically and psychologically attainable. If hardly anyone can really live up to such a standard, then discussions around sainthood may be meaningless outside philosophical debates.

Carbonell (2012) and Flescher (2003) have argued for a psychologically realistic standard of saints. It seems pretty self-evident that we do not want morality for angels; instead, we want

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[15] Recall that, according to Wolf, pursuing sainthood can be unhealthy, as she thinks morality itself is not a suitable object of passion (1982, 424). If that were true, then we should stop praising saints lest ordinary people aspire to become like them.

our moral standards to be applicable to ordinary people. However, such a view requires more consideration, as it remains questionable whether a high standard that few people can achieve is meaningless. Knowing the ideal standard can be helpful even if nobody can achieve such a standard. For instance, a simple analogy would be a test that is so difficult that nobody can correctly answer all the questions. Still, it is helpful to have an answer sheet available. People can learn from correctly the questions they get wrong by looking at the answer sheet with perfect answers. People learn from the standard of perfection, even if they cannot become as good as the standard. Analogously, I believe the standard of moral saints can function similarly; even if nobody can fully achieve the moral ideal, people can learn from it and perform better. Even if nobody can become saints, learning what they ought to do can nevertheless inspire us to become better people. Thus, although being psychologically realistic may be a virtue of a moral standard, it is not necessary for a standard to be meaningful.[16]

Moreover, I agree that people's psychological and practical capacities are relevant for determining their *all-things-considered* duties. As the aphorism "ought implies can" suggests, someone's all-things-considered duties are relative to their abilities and opportunities to act accordingly.[17] Thus, even if everyone has a *prima facie* duty to become a saint, such a duty may not become an all-things-considered duty for everyone: different people's all-things-considered duties are not the same. A football player has a *prima facie* duty to become as good as Ms. Ball, but they may not have the requisite abilities. Most players are not capable of being as good as Ms. Ball because they are not born with her level of sporting talent. Some have talents that might enable them to become as excellent as Ms. Ball, but most can never be as good as her.

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[16] See Braddock (2013) and Berkey (2016) for discussion on why we cannot presume being too demanding is a grounded objection to moral theories.
[17] Adopted from van Ackeren and Kühler (2016, 9).

Likewise, even if ordinary people have *prima facie* duties to become saints, most cannot succeed. Saints may possess certain character traits (e.g., abundant empathy or indifference to material comforts) that make them suited to sainthood in ways that most ordinary people cannot become.[18] Psychology studies show that extraordinary altruists, on average, have enhanced volumes in the right amygdala and high sensitivities to fearful facial expressions compared to ordinary people.[19] They also have higher activation in affective in their anterior insula when they observe a stranger in pain, revealing that heightened neural instantiations of empathy correspond to altruism.[20] Therefore, given that the difference between ordinary people and saints who perform altruistic acts may be biological, some people with similar brain functions may become saints easier than others.[21]

Psychological evidence also supports that the capacities to gain virtues and knowledge are both innate and nurtured. Kristen Dunfield and Valerie Kuhlmeier (2010) show that infants seem to be born with the capacity to realize that others ought to be helped. Infants can have a sense of fairness. Stephanie Sloane's team proves that differences in degrees of empathy and some other character traits are, at least, partially innate (2012). Some ordinary people may possess similar character traits conducive to sainthood, but others may not. Saints may also have opportunities that others do not have. For example, Dr. Good has the opportunity to know the condition of the epidemic in the foreign city, but some other doctors do not. For some, who are capable and have the opportunities, their *prima facie* duties to become saints may become their

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[18] This may sound eerily Nietzschean to some, but I do not mean that only some people are born able to be great. People who cannot become saints can still live great lives in other respects, as Ms. Ball and Mr. Rich do.
[19] See Marsh et al. (2007).
[20] See Brethel-Haurwitz et al. (2018).
[21] The studies have not shown whether such differences in brain size and function are because saints are born different, or their brains are developed in those ways later in their lives. No empirical evidence suggests that people not born with similar brain functions cannot become saints. Thus, I am only saying that some people can become saints easier than others.

all-things-considered duties when conditions allow (e.g., when we are capable of doing so without costing anything morally comparable). However, given that people are not born with equal capacities and do not have equal opportunities to develop or utilize those capacities, many people do not have all-things-considered duties to become saints. Capacities and opportunities need to be considered when attempting to determine what people actually ought to do. I shall discuss more ordinary people's duties in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: The Developmental View

Although ordinary people have *prima facie* duties (some even have all-things-considered duties) to become saints, how can they actually become saints? I believe the answer is: through moral development. As saints possess extraordinary moral virtues and knowledge (Chapters 2), to become saints, ordinary people ought to develop morally by acquiring virtues and knowledge gradually throughout their lives. In this section, I introduce the *developmental view*—a synthesis of Flescher's developmental thesis and Dougherty's dynamic view of beneficence—to explain the process of moral development. I then discuss how the developmental view is closely connected to the Aristotelian-inspired definition of "saint" and collectively portray a full picture of sainthood.

4.1 Three Kinds of Duties

Flescher believes morality is not simply about how good one is at a specific time. Instead, it is about continuously developing oneself to become a certain kind of person. We are not born virtuous, nor do we acquire virtues in an instant. Instead, we have duties to improve ourselves morally and to become more virtuous. As Flescher puts it, we have duties to "'strain' ourselves to the greatest degree possible to perform 'the finest actions'" (2003, 247). Becoming virtuous is a long-term—if not life-long—process; it is a process of continuous moral development. Flescher also takes context into account: "morality requires different things from different people at different times, as well as different things from the same person at different

times" (2003, 238–239). We should aim at moral ideals and constantly work toward these goals. Yet, our actual duties vary according to our stages of moral development.

Likewise, Dougherty believes that "there is no one-size-fits-all account of beneficence's demands" (2017, 723). As people become morally better, they should increase how much they sacrifice to help others accordingly. In other words, the more morally developed someone is, the stronger duty to sacrifice for others they have. In the long run, we may become so morally developed someday that we ought to endorse altruistic lives. Dougherty proposes the dynamic view of beneficence, stating that ordinary people have three kinds of duties (2017, 725–726):

D1: The initial level of minimal moral requirement that all must meet.

D2: The duty to develop morally.

D3: The duty to increase how much one sacrifices for others as one develops.[22]

I shall refer to D1 as a *basic duty*, D2 as a *developmental duty*, and D3 as a *dynamic duty*. I shall explain how each duty applies to saints and ordinary people in order to bring together the developmental view and the Aristotelian-inspired definition of "saint."

A. Basic Duty

Moral development begins with having a basic duty to not fall below the minimum. Everyone ought to satisfy basic duties, such as the duty to not cause unjust harm, to not kill, and to not torture. Dougherty believes everyone who bears moral obligations ought to satisfy basic

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[22] Dougherty proposes D2 and D3 as *pro tanto* duties in his work. I slightly change the original definition here as I also aim to discuss circumstances when these *pro tanto* duties may become all-things-considered duties. Flescher also demonstrates these three duties and how they connect on the Aristotelian eudaimonist grounds. He sees D2 as "Aristotelian in nature" and in itself suitable for good human living. See Flescher (2003, 239–242).

duties, regardless of their stages of moral development and whether they find satisfying these

duties difficult (2017, 726). Basic duties apply equally to saints and ordinary people.

B. Developmental Duty[23]

Dougherty and Flescher argue that ordinary people have developmental duties to become

morally better. Flescher holds that everyone has the duty to push themselves beyond their current

stage of development; they are morally bound to better themselves (2003, 239–240). Dougherty

claims everyone has the (*prima facie*) duty to realize their potential by developing morally at a

moderate rate (2017, 725). Aristotle also discusses moral development. He argues that people

originally may not acquire morally good characters, but once they have acquired them, they are

no long free not to have them (114a).

Given that people have different capacities and opportunities, I believe that the rates of

moral development vary across individuals. We ought to realize our potential by developing

morally at reasonable rates over time when we have the capacities and opportunities to do so.

Since ordinary people have *prima facie* duties to become saints and saints possess

extraordinary moral virtues and knowledge, ordinary people have *prima facie* duties to develop

toward sainthood by acquiring virtues and knowledge. However, they do not have the same all-

things-considered developmental duties. A person born with high intelligence to acquire more

knowledge, high empathy to acquire more virtues, or has good moral education, has more

developmental duties than others. Those born with suitable character traits or who have good

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[23] I am assuming that one can have a duty of character development and becoming better people, following Flescher, who puts it as a "meta-duty" that is not directly related to specific actions (2003, 239). Nevertheless, for people who hold that "duty" can only refer to the obligation to *act* in certain ways, the developmental duty can be interpreted as a duty to act in whatever ways that lead to character development.

opportunities have duties to develop morally at fast paces; some may even ultimately have developmental duties to become saint-like. For those who are not born with character traits and who do not have opportunities that enable them to become saints, their *prima facie* duties to be as developed as saints are undermined by their limited capacities or opportunities. They thus may not have all-things-considered duties to become saints. Nevertheless, they still ought to become the best possible versions of themselves and to develop at reasonable rates that their capacities and opportunities allow throughout their lives. Moral development can be a life-long duty.

As before, some may object that to fulfill developmental duties sounds too demanding for ordinary people. It sounds daunting that people must constantly push themselves to acquire virtues and knowledge—to constantly study what is good and act accordingly—and all of these must be done as quickly as possible. If ordinary people can never be good enough, then many may be discouraged from pursuing what is morally good in the first place.

In response, I think fulfilling developmental duties may not be as demanding as it appears. People are required to fulfill their developmental duties gradually, not all at once. Even Dorothy Day, who believes that we should embrace her ascetic life, would surely not insist that we should sacrifice as much as her immediately. Someone who spontaneously donates all their money to famine relief after learning Dorothy Day's story is not saint-like but appears overhasty and careless. I think it is realistic to expect people to increase their moral status gradually, as acquiring moral virtues and knowledge takes time. For example, to acquire moral knowledge, one has to reason carefully about what actions they are capable of performing and how to choose when multiple good actions conflict. Gaining moral knowledge proceeds through careful contemplation, and careful contemplation takes time. As such, moral development can be relatively slow; people seldom have to develop significantly in a short space of time.

Moreover, knowing that we are never good enough may push us to act better. Studies of moral self-licensing suggest that people with positive self-conceptions experience less inhibition or guilt when committing norm-violating actions.[24] If so, then believing that we are good enough may lead us to act immorally, while believing that we need to continue improving ourselves may lead to better moral outcomes. The realization that we have continuous developmental duties may, in fact, prevent wrongdoing and inspire us to become better versions of ourselves—we have a practical reason to believe that what morality requires of us ought to be quite demanding.

C. Dynamic Duty

Dougherty believes that people ought to increase how much they sacrifice for others when they have previously met their developmental duties (2017, 725). As the stages of moral development increase, duties to sacrifice for others increase accordingly. As people fulfill their developmental duties to a greater degree, they ought to fulfill an expanding range of dynamic duties. Flescher interprets the increase in dynamic duties in terms of virtues: an extraordinarily virtuous person ought to sacrifice more for others than someone less virtuous (2003, 239). In the long term, as people develop toward moral ideals, their dynamic duties will also increase toward what a fully virtuous person—a saint—would be required to do.

I shall call a dynamic duty accessible to someone at a given stage of moral development *operative duty* and a dynamic duty that is not yet accessible *potential duty*.

Operative duty: A dynamic duty that falls within the range of one's duty, relative to one's stage of moral development.

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[24] See Merritt et al. (2010, 347).

Potential duty: A dynamic duty that is supererogatory, relative to one's stage of moral development.

Suppose Mr. Young is a minimally decent young teenager. He has basic duties not to cheat or steal, but he does not have as many duties to help others as a morally mature person. It may not be immoral for him to refrain from giving food to a hungry child when he has food, as he may not know morality requires him to sacrifice for others in need. The duty to help others is *currently* not psychologically possible for him. Nevertheless, if he has good opportunities for moral education, he has a developmental duty to become morally decent. Such a decent individual has the duty to give a hungry child food. Thus, giving food to the hungry child will become a duty for Mr. Young *in the future*. It is currently supererogatory, but it will become obligatory in the future when he develops to a higher stage. As Dougherty states, beneficence has "a temporal profile": what someone must do now may differ from what they must do in the future (2017, 718). If Mr. Young acquires more knowledge and becomes more benevolent later in his life, such a potential duty to give food will become his operative duty. Compared to a young teenager, it is immoral for a mature person to refrain from giving food to a hungry child. Thus, once Mr. Young has had such a duty, he can no longer claim that, *ceteris paribus*, helping others is supererogatory.

Therefore, only an operative duty can become someone's all-things-considered duty when conditions allow. An action may be supererogatory and fall within someone's potential duty when its goodness is unknown to them, or its fulfillment is psychologically unrealistic. As we develop, we gain virtues and knowledge to learn about and practice our duties, so more

actions will become practically and psychologically realistic and fall within our operative

duties.[25] Thus, potential duties become operative as one fulfills more developmental duties.

Nevertheless, I do not believe that "operative duty" is a synonym for "all-things-

considered duty." Not all operative duties become a person's all-things-considered duties. Like

one's developmental duties depends on their capacities and opportunities, what operative

dynamic duties can become a person's all-things-considered duties is subjective in similar ways.

As Carbonell (2015) demonstrates, even if people have the same duties in principle, differences

in circumstances and resources still constrain what they are capable of doing in particular

instances. For instance, assume Dr. Good and her college Dr. Kind are both highly morally

developed and have the same operative duty to help patients in foreign cities. In a particular

instance when the pandemic was raging in a foreign city, only Dr. Good was told about the

situation. Consequently, Dr. Kind did not volunteer to help because she did not know there was a

pandemic. Dr. Kind, though has the same operative duty to help, does not have an all-things-

considered duty given that she lacks knowledge about what is going on. Her lack of information

and resources constrains what duty she actually has in this particular instance. Since Dr. Kind

could not have helped, and since "ought implies can," Dr. Kind does not have an all-things-

considered duty to help. Thus, only Dr. Good has such an all-things-considered duty to help.

People's all-things-considered duties still vary across individuals and instances, even if they have

the same operative duty.

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[25] Dougherty states that altruism can become easier over time by developing virtues (2017, 721). He introduces the research of psychologists Mark Muraven and Roy Baumeister (2000), which suggests that self-control improves with practice, like muscles getting stronger from repeated exertion. Hence, moral development can make altruistic actions psychologically possible.

Saints are fully virtuous and have fulfilled their developmental duties. They thus have to fulfill all dynamic duties. Given that ordinary people have *prima facie* duties to become saints, they also have *prima facie* duties to fulfill dynamic duties at some point. However, due to their current stages of moral development, ordinary people can only have all-things-considered duties to fulfill operative dynamic duties accessible to them. Thus, an action that falls within saints' operative duty may currently count as our potential duty—an action obligatory to saints may be supererogatory to us. Nevertheless, that action may fall within our operative duty sometime in the future, in later stages of moral development. Consequently, even a saintly action may become our duty someday when we finally fulfill all of our developmental duties.

The view I have put forward contradicts Urmson's view regarding the relationship between sainthood and supererogation. Urmson defines "saint" by reference to their supererogatory actions: supererogation is necessary for sainthood. However, saints' testimony reveals that no action is supererogatory for them. Rightly so, as saints fulfill all their developmental duties, they have to fulfill all dynamic duties. An action becomes supererogatory when it falls within one's potential duty, but saints who have to fulfill all dynamic duties do not have a potential duty. Thus, no action is beyond their call of duty; even altruistic actions are obligatory. Supererogation is, in fact, incompatible with sainthood.

A possible objection is that the view I have outlined leads to absurdity. The same action can fall within a saint's operative duty and an ordinary person's potential duty. If both the saint and the ordinary person help someone in a pertinent scenario, the saint is performing their duty while the ordinary person is acting beyond their duty. It seems that the ordinary person is acting better than the saint. Yet, if this were the case, a person who performs a praiseworthy yet

supererogatory action (even if they do not know the action's moral worth) deserves more praise than a saint who performs the same action on a call of duty. On the face of it, this seems absurd.

In response, I think such an objection confuses what is *action*-focused with what is *agent*-focused. Someone performing an action that is more praiseworthy than another is not, by that very fact, a morally better person overall. Virtues, not actions, are what essentially make someone morally good. Saying that someone performs a supererogatory action is action-focused. It considers whether the action is praiseworthy, but that does not necessarily align with whether the agent who performs the action is good. Whether an action is supererogatory depends on whether it falls within the agent's *potential dynamic duty*. However, whether an agent is morally good depends on how many *developmental duties* they have fulfilled—how virtuous they are. What makes an action good does not always align with what makes a person good; the two scenarios depend on different types of duties. We praise ordinary people more than saints when they perform the same good action because we have higher expectations for saints as they are overall morally better. Thus, *ceteris paribus*, the ordinary person's *action* deserves more praise, but the saint is the morally better and more praiseworthy *person* overall.

4.2 The Aristotelian-Inspired Definition & the Developmental View

So far, I have proposed an Aristotelian-inspired definition of "saint" and introduced the developmental view of duty. I believe these two theories are closely connected. The Aristotelian-inspired account consists of two parts: character (virtues and knowledge) and actions. Character is more fundamental to saints' moral worth, and saintly actions should result from possessing

character. Similarly, the developmental view can be interpreted as consisting of two parts: duties about character and duties about actions. Developmental duties are about character, as they emphasize moral virtues and knowledge people ought to acquire. Dynamic and basic duties are about actions as they emphasize moral actions people ought to perform. The fulfillment of duties about character is more fundamental to determining an individual's overall moral worth, and duties about actions change according to the fulfillment of duties about character.

Therefore, I think the two views are parallel and intertwined as they work together to explain the process of becoming a saint. If we interpret the process from the developmental view's perspective, developmental duties push an agent to acquire more virtues and knowledge; as they gain more virtues and knowledge, these traits result in better actions that help them satisfy their dynamic duties. If we interpret the process starting from the definition of "saint," when someone acquires extraordinary moral virtues and knowledge, they fulfill all developmental duties; thus, they ought to fulfill all dynamic duties by performing saintly actions. The developmental view explains how a person becomes a saint in terms of moral development, and the Aristotelian-inspired definition explains how saints meet their developmental and dynamic duties by possessing virtues and knowledge that lead them to perform saintly actions. Hence, combining these two theories helps us understand the full picture of sainthood.

Therefore, I believe that, compared to an agent-focused account, action-focused accounts of sainthood only capture a static snapshot of saints at a time in terms of their actions in particular cases. They focus on the moments when the saints perform extraordinary actions but leave out why they do so and how they become saints. In contrast, combining the Aristotelian-inspired definition of "saint" and the developmental view of duty, I believe we should understand sainthood through the process of moral development, and people's duties are in fact

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dynamic, not static. As the developmental view reveals, moral saints develop from ordinary people by gradually gaining extraordinary degrees of moral virtues and fair amounts of moral knowledge, leading to saintly actions, and fulfilling all developmental and dynamic duties.

Chapter 5: The Standing to Blame

In previous chapters, I have argued that ordinary people, like us, have *prima facie* duties to become saints. For some, those *prima facie* duties may even become all-things-considered duties. If they fail to fulfill those duties, it entails that they are doing something morally wrong. However, it seems counterintuitive and counterproductive to blame people for acting wrongly when they fail to become saints. Very few of us, if any, fulfill those duties. If not trying one's hardest to become a saint is blameworthy, almost everyone is blameworthy. That conclusion sounds unappealing.

In this chapter, I address this issue in two ways. Firstly, I argue that performing a morally wrong action does not guarantee the person acting is blameworthy. Moral wrongness and blameworthiness are not mutually inclusive. Hence, even if we grant that failing to morally develop to the greatest extent is wrong, the person who does such a wrong may not be blameworthy. Secondly, even if someone deserves blame, not everyone may have the standing to blame them. Some people have more standing to blame them than others. A fairly morally decent person may be blameworthy if they could have done better, but those who are not as decent as them may not have the standing to blame them.

5.1 Moral Wrongness and Blameworthiness

If a person fails to act saintly (or fails their operative dynamic duties), I believe there are two possible situations. First, they fail because they do not know they should have done so. Second, they fail but know they should have done so.

Let us consider the first situation. If one does not know they should perform an act, they either could have known or they could not have known. For the latter, if they could not have known they have such a duty, performing the act falls within their potential dynamic duty. Since "ought implies can," if one could not have known so, we cannot say that they should have known better. Consider Mr. Young's case. When Mr. Young is young, he cannot know that he should help the hungry child. Hence, he is not blameworthy if he does not do so, given that his duty to help is not operative yet. When a person could not know they should perform an act, they have not gained enough moral knowledge and reached the level of moral development to have such a duty. They thus do not have an all-things-considered duty to perform such an act and are not blameworthy. As discussed in previous chapters, the Aristotelian-inspired view attributes sainthood based on the attributes of the person instead of their actions. Thus, when our actions fall short of sainthood, we may be excused from blame because we are not yet saints.

For the former, if they do not know but could have known, they may be blameworthy for failing their developmental duty by not acquiring the moral knowledge they ought to. Elinor Mason believes for someone to be blameworthy, we must interpret the claim "she should have known better" in a fairly subjective way (2015, 3043). For instance, after Mr. Young grows up, he becomes a smart young man, receives good moral education, and has plenty of opportunities

to learn about what is right. However, despite his good opportunities and capacities, he still does not know that he should help the starving child. His action of not helping the child is not blameworthy as he does not know he should do so, but he is nevertheless blameworthy overall for not knowing better. In other words, he should have acquired moral knowledge and fulfilled his developmental duty. He is blameworthy for failing such a duty. Thus, when people fail short of sainthood because they do not know they should act saintly but should have known so, they may be blameworthy if they do not have a valid reason for failing their developmental duty.

In this section, I want to focus on the second situation when people know their duties but fall short of them. I believe this is the situation when most people fail to perform morally good acts. They know what they ought to do, but they fail regardless. Many people believe they should help those in need, but few frequently take active actions to donate. Not everyone Peter Singer persuades donates everything that is not of comparative moral worth to famine relief. Not everyone who believes eating meat is morally impermissible stops eating meat. It seems we act wrongly when we refuse to donate or give up eating meat, but we do so, feeling little guilt. I never see people blame others for buying luxuries or eating meat in my everyday life. I once commented (somewhat seriously) on a person who was so rich that he did not know how to spend his money that he could always donate to famine relief – that comment made my friends who also study philosophy giggle. Our philosophical discussions on morality seem distant from how we behave daily.

However, situations like this almost happen to everyone. Many people fail some moral duties knowingly from time to time. Almost everyone becomes blameworthy if we want to blame people for such wrongdoing. But in reality, we do not think in such a way. Few people hold such a standard on themselves and others and genuinely think people who fail those

everyday duties deserve blame. It may even seem inappropriate to blame people for wrongdoing that almost everyone does.

I cannot propose a complete account of what makes someone blameworthy, but I argue that someone's acting wrongly does not entail that they are blameworthy. T.M. Scanlon (2008) even holds that the belief that another has acted wrongly is not a part of the blame. He thinks the attribution of blame is determined by whether the person has impaired meaningful interpersonal relations, which is separable from the action's moral wrongness. I agree with Scanlon that wrongness and blameworthiness are separable. For example: in *Les Misérables*, the protagonist Jean Valjean stole a break to feed his sister and her seven sons when food was scarce. He was caught and imprisoned for five years. Stealing is wrong, but few readers are willing to blame him for that. Instead, we sympathize with Jean Valjean, believing he deserved forgiveness because he only stole to sustain his family's living. In such a society where resource is scarce, it seems inappropriate to blame people for committing a minor wrong to increase their chances of survival. Therefore, I believe actions can be wrong but not blameworthy.

Moreover, in "Impermissible yet Praiseworthy," Theron Pummer argues that a wrong action can be praiseworthy (2021, 710). He gives the following example:

"*Costly No-Conflict*: Two strangers face a deadly threat. You can do nothing, sacrifice your legs in a way that would save one stranger, or sacrifice your legs in another way that would save both."

If you sacrifice your legs to save one stranger, Pummer believes you are wrong but still praiseworthy. It is wrong because you can sacrifice your legs in a way that would save both – you ought to save one more person, given that there is no extra cost. However, although it is

wrong to only save one, it is still praiseworthy for you to save one person at the cost of your legs. To many of us, such an act is altruistic and heroic, which deserves praise.[26]

Therefore, people who fail to act in a saintly manner despite having sufficient moral knowledge can be wrong without being blameworthy. Consider the following case. Prof. Ordinary is a philosophy professor who teaches ethics. He does not earn much, but he has some savings. He donated roughly 5% of his savings to famine relief, but he still saves a large portion in case he or his family members will need it sometime. As an overly careful person, his saving is sufficient for him to undergo any accidents or emergencies that may happen to him or his family. The chance that these accidents will happen to him is almost zero, and he can donate more to famine relief. As an ethicist, he knows that saving so much money is irrational and should donate more. His decision not to donate more is wrong, but it appears that he is not blameworthy.

Now consider Prof. Luxury, Prof. Ordinary's colleague. He earns the same as Prof. Ordinary and also donates 5% of his savings to famine relief. They know equally well that they have duties to donate everything not of comparable moral significance to famine relief. However, he spends 50% on purchasing luxuries. I am inclined to say that Prof. Luxury is blameworthy, although both have acted wrongly. The line between whether someone is blameworthy is drawn somewhere between Prof. Ordinary and Prof. Luxury, but there may be a grey area. There are many reasons why people fail in their duties and act wrongly; we are more lenient to some than others in attributing blame. Nevertheless, in general, the criterion for

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[26] In this case, although we cannot blame you for sacrificing your leg to save one, I think we can still demand an answer regarding why you have not choose to save both. Nevertheless, demanding an answer is very different from blaming in that it is not a condemnation to one's moral failings.

blameworthiness seems to have a higher bar than that of wrongness: we do not always blame people when they knowingly make the wrong decision.

If that is the case, whether a person is blameworthy for a certain action (or inaction) does not solely rely on the action. More background information about why the person acts, sometimes their personality, is required to determine whether their action is blameworthy. As Mason demonstrates, "For an agent to be blameworthy, there must be something that we can pin to the agent" (2015, 3043). The appraisal of blameworthiness is connected to the agent closer than wrongness, "it must have something to do with the agent's will" (2015, 3044). Ishtiyaque Haji provides a similar point. He believes that appraisals of blameworthiness involve "primarily assessments that impute fault or credit to the agent and have to do with how the agent perceives her situation and options, or, simplifying, with what moves the agent to act" (2015, 138). Compared to wrongness, which is "act-focused," blameworthiness is "agent-focused," since it relies more on the subjective psychologies of why one performs such an action (2015, 138). For instance, we know that Prof. Ordinary has an overly careful personality, so he perceives how much money he needs differently. That is why we do not blame his wrong judgment and decisions. Suppose Prof. Luxury's personality makes him especially prone to luxurious temptations. He tries hard to control it and puts great effort into donating 5% instead of buying luxuries. In that case, his action is still wrong but less blameworthy. How we assess a person's psychology for an action greatly influences whether we think one is blameworthy.

Moreover, I think Prof. Ordinary deserves praise. 5% of his saving is not a small amount; it can make a difference to many starving children. Prof. Ordinary is doing better than most people, as most do not regularly donate to famine relief. In addition, if we blame Prof. Ordinary instead of praising him, people who donate less may think it is pointless to donate more because

they will be blamed regardless. Thus, I think blaming Prof. Ordinary for not fulfilling his duties and acting saintly is inappropriate and practically unwise. He is "good enough" among ordinary people.

I do not aim to provide a criterion for the necessary and sufficient definitions of when is failing one's developmental and dynamic duties blameworthy. I only want to argue that the bar is higher than when failing those duties is wrong. We need to assess more factors when determining whether someone is blameworthy than whether someone's action is wrong. For those, and many of us, who have not met their developmental duties, have neither become saints, nor become the morally best version of themselves, they can still be "good enough" that does not deserve blame. Some of them may even deserve praise.

5.2 The Standing to Blame

There is also a difference between whether someone is blameworthy and whether we have the standing to blame someone. Even if someone is blameworthy, it may be inappropriate for us to blame them. The action of blaming someone involves three parts: (1) the blamer, (2) the process of blaming, and (3) the person being blamed. Whether someone is blameworthy is a question focusing on (3), while whether we have the standing to blame someone depends on (1) and (3). Thus, even if someone is blameworthy, it does not entail anyone has the standing to blame them: not everyone is the appropriate blamer.

Consider Prof. Ordinary and Prof. Luxury again. Even if we believe they are blameworthy for not donating more, most of us who do not donate at all have no standing to

blame them. Blaming someone for their moral failing while having the same moral failing does not seem appropriate.

R. Jay Wallace believes blame contains "a kind of practical commitment to critical self-scrutiny" (2010, 326). When we blame someone else for their moral failings, we cannot be guilty of the same failings (2010, 316–317). Blaming others involves critically assessing their attitudes and behaviors. Blaming others while having the same moral failings is objectionable and hypocritical as we fail to critically assess our own attitudes and behaviors according to the same standard. Therefore, blaming others without blaming oneself involves "an implicit ascription of differential significance to one's own interests" (2010, 331–332). If we blame Prof. Ordinary for not donating enough, but we do not donate at all, our blame becomes hypocritical. We hold Prof. Ordinary to a different standard than ourselves and fail to apply the same critical attitudes to our own moral failings. Therefore, it seems we only have the standing to blame someone when we do not have the same moral failings.

Nevertheless, some may argue that, although some people fail to perform the same moral actions, their failure is due to bad moral luck. They may not have the opportunities to perform those acts, or they could not have developed in a way that fulfills their potentials. If they had the same good luck, they would have developed or performed the morally required acts. Consider Dr. Good's colleague Dr. Kind again. Dr. Kind has not volunteered in the depleted medical force to help patients in another city because he does not know that a pandemic is raging. She would have volunteered if she had been told about the situation. Suppose Dr. Kind encounters another colleague, Dr. Bad. Dr. Bad tells her about the situation and claims that he knows the situation but refuses to help. It seems reasonable for Dr. Kind to blame Dr. Bad, because if she had equal knowledge about the situation, she would have acted better than Dr. Bad. Thus, in some cases,

one can blame others for acting wrongly even if they have not done something better due to a lack of opportunities. If one believes they would act better than another given the same opportunity, they may have the standing to blame.

In addition, sometimes it is inapt to blame someone for their moral failings even if we actually act better than them. Some people act wrongly because they have bad moral luck or lack opportunities for moral education. For instance, Gary Watson (1987) discussed Robert Harris, who committed cruel murder as a result of tragic formative circumstances. Although he committed terrible wrongs, I think we should blame him less because his act is due to a lack of moral education. The environment he grows up in fails to give him a common sense of morality or social norms. I doubt we can act better if we grow up in a similar environment. We use different standards for holding adults and children morally responsible, believing they are in different stages of moral development. Hence, it is also reasonable to use different standards for different adults according to their individual backgrounds. Before we blame, we can always ask the person we want to blame, "Why do you do that?" I think blaming is related to empathy; we put ourselves in other people's shoes to see whether we can understand the reasons behind their acts or do better in their situations.

Therefore, even if a person can be blameworthy for acting wrongly, if they are already better than most people, almost nobody can have the standing to blame him. For an almost saint-like ordinary rich person, for example, it sounds absurd if we blame them for donating 90% of their savings to famine relief instead of 99%. We ought to praise them even if they correctly believe that they ought to donate 99%. Recall that, in Chapter 2, I mention Urmson defines "saint" in two ways. I previously focus on those who act beyond the call of duty and argue that such a definition is self-contradictory. Nevertheless, I believe the other conception captures an

important element in sainthood. Specifically, according to Urmson, saints regularly perform their

duty "in contexts where inclination, desire, or self-interest would lead most people not to" (1958,

201). They are morally better than ordinary people because they overcome more hardship to

perform their duties. Ordinary good people may not successfully overcome all their desires,

temptations, and self-interest every time, but they also overcome more hardship to perform their

duties than most people. Therefore, for the same reason why we praise saints, we should also

praise ordinary good people overall, although they occasionally fail in their duties.[27]

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[27] Also, in Chapter 3, I have argued that praising someone implies that we have at least a prima facie duty to be like them. Like we ought to aspire to sainthood, we should also push ourselves towards becoming those ordinary good people. See also Carbonell (2012).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In my thesis, I have argued that the essence of saints involves possessing extraordinary moral virtues and moral knowledge that lead them to consistently perform morally good actions for morally good reasons. Based on saints' testimony, I have claimed that saints' altruistic actions fall within the boundaries of their duties. Furthermore, praising saints implies that ordinary people like us have *prima facie* duties to become like them. We ought to strive to become the morally best versions of ourselves. Yet, our paces of moral development can be influenced by our capacities and opportunities. I have also distinguished between operative and potential dynamic duty. I have argued that the more morally developed someone is, the more operative duties they have. We should thus develop morally over time and fulfill increasing ranges of dynamic duties as we develop—some of us can and should eventually become saints. However, I hold moral wrongness and blameworthy are two separate questions. Although we have strong moral duties to become the morally best version of ourselves and perform good actions, sometimes, we are not blameworthy if we wrongly fail those duties. Moreover, in some cases, we do not have the standing to blame others' moral flaws, because we may have similar flaws. Instead of criticizing each other, I hope my discussion on sainthood inspires people to improve themselves by gaining virtues and knowledge.

Still, this paper has limitations in many ways. I believe the discussion of moral saints is stuck in a strange position of assuming a background that is ideal and non-ideal at the same time. Neither utopic nor dystopic society needs saints; the discussion only applies to society somewhere in the middle.

On the one hand, if we live in a utopia where everyone does their "fair share" in helping others, discussing sainthood would no longer be useful. This paper, however, assumes we are not in such a utopia. The moral obligations of saints that I propose are way more than doing their "fair share." For instance, I have mentioned famine relief multiple times in my thesis. In 2021, the top 1% of the global population own 45.6% of the wealth.[28] If everyone is doing their "fair share," the problem of poverty would be solved mathematically. Therefore, in a utopia, we do not need anyone to "strip themselves" for others. Saints would not need to donate 90% of their savings, and famine would be solved by the rich. If everyone is doing their "fair share," saints' burdens would significantly decrease to the point that altruistic acts are rarely necessary. Hence, we only discuss sainthood because we live in a non-ideal world. Nevertheless, if ordinary people like us all try our best to fulfill our duties, maybe, one day, we can live in a somewhat ideal world where saints do not have to sacrifice so much. Saints are doing more than their "fair share," partially because most of us are not doing our "fair share."

On the other hand, however, the discussion of sainthood assumes an ideal background that people who have the duties to become saints are under oppression or other serious constraints. Sainthood is probably not a goal to pursue if one is under oppression or constraints. Moral virtues, such as benevolence and a sense of fairness, probably will not lead to good outcomes in some disadvantaged situation, such as prisons. Elijah Anderson (1999) gives another example: in some disadvantaged, socially isolated neighborhoods, physical toughness and violence are respected qualities and are essential for social control and self-protection. Moral virtues, however, are harmful to individual's survival and the maintenance of communal order overall. Consider all the well-known dystopian stories, possessing extraordinary moral virtues

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[28] See Credit Suisse Research Institute (2022).

would not make an individual survive long. Thus, the discussion of moral saints presumes that society holds conventional moral values. Lawrence Blum (1994) proposes a "limited community relativism," in which he claims that societies perceive their duties differently due to different levels of virtues that members in societies collectively exhibit. And there is more than one legitimate conception of duty across culture, communities and even individuals. I admit that the discussion of sainthood and moral duties may not exceed the somewhat ideal situation that we live in. Moreover, discussing ordinary people's duty to become saints could even be privileged. Asking what duties saints and ordinary people to help others explores morality from the perspective of people offering help, instead of from those who need help. It does not discuss what people in disadvantaged situations ought to do: what will morality require individuals to do in an environment that operates with different moral codes? What qualities are seen as their "virtues"? The background assumptions of our discussion on sainthood are beyond the scope of this paper, but I think it is important to acknowledge its limited perspective and research those related topics in the future.

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