

"MORAL JUSTIFICATION UNDER OPPRESSION"

**REGINA RINI
YORK UNIVERSITY**

Normally when someone makes a moral claim on my actions, I am entitled to demand justification from them and to set their claim aside if no justification is provided. But that framework runs into trouble under conditions of systemic social oppression. When a moral claim comes from a member of an oppressed group, they may be unable to effectively communicate justification, due to hermeneutic injustice (following Miranda Fricker) or due to the essentially experiential features of oppression (following Laurence Thomas). Further, demanding justification from oppressed people can take the form of what Nora Berenstain calls 'epistemic exploitation': forcing oppressed people to regularly perform uncompensated epistemic labor on behalf of the privileged. In this paper I offer a re-thinking of the practice of moral justification, aimed at addressing these problems. I argue we may sometimes be required to defer to moral claims made by oppressed people even when they do not or cannot offer (what seem to us) convincing reasons. However, I resist the further suggestion that we should not even seek justification for moral claims by the oppressed. To ground this partial revision of our practices, I articulate a conception of moral justification as aimed at acknowledging the moral agency of both parties to a moral claim. Demanding a justification, and attempting to meet this demand, are forms of mutual recognition, and they have value even when the conditions of oppression prevent effective communication of reasons.

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2020
3:30 P.M. EDT.**

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