

# The Slow Clap Phenomenon

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## 1. The phenomenon

Consider the following cases.

WOW, SUCH RESTRAINT. You are at a department social event. Your colleague approaches you with a broad smile and proudly exclaims, “Hey, guess what? I haven’t sexually harassed *anyone* today!”

WOW, REAL PROVIDERS. You are at brunch with a friend. She points out, in slightly smug tones, that she and her partners have fed their children every day for the past year.

WOW, HOW GRACIOUS. You are at a conference. One of the other attendees observes approvingly that those in the audience refrained from viciously deriding a nervous graduate student during the Q&A after their not-very-good talk.

If you are anything like me, then you will react to the pride, smugness, and approval in these cases with mild bemusement at best. That’s because the protagonists — the colleague, friend, and conference attendee — each act like a certain type of behavior is praiseworthy when it is intuitively not praiseworthy at all.<sup>1</sup> Intuitively, *merely* refraining from sexual harassment, feeding one’s children each day, and refraining from gratuitously laying into nervous graduate students are not praiseworthy behaviors. So it is perplexing to hear someone talk as if they are praiseworthy. We might wonder whether the person is making some sort of joke. And, if we are convinced that they are perfectly sincere, then we might have a different sort of reaction: we might experience exasperation and mild irritation, of the sort that we would perhaps express with a sigh and a roll of the eyes or — if we are given to sarcasm — with a slow clap and a blank expression. Call this phenomenon, whereby expressions of hearty approval of certain types of behavior elicit puzzlement at best and exasperation at worst, *the slow clap phenomenon*.

These three examples demonstrate the breadth of the slow clap phenomenon and so help us to dispense quickly with some too-simple putative explanations of it. First: one might think that the phenomenon simply highlights the virtue of *modesty*, which requires us to refrain from calling attention to our moral achievements.<sup>2</sup> But this does not appear to be the ultimate explanation of the phenomenon. For it still arises in cases, such as WOW, HOW GRACIOUS, in which someone praises the actions of third parties rather than their own actions. Second: one might think that the phenomenon shows that we are not

<sup>1</sup>Note: here and throughout the paper I am concerned with *moral* praiseworthiness. There may be other kinds of praiseworthiness and what I say may or may not generalize to them. I take no stand on these matters. <sup>2</sup>See especially Wilson (2016), on the kindness that can be displayed by someone directs others’ attention away from her achievements, and also Bommarito (2013) on the importance of avoiding dwelling on one’s achievements.

praiseworthy for simply refraining from acting wrongly and that praiseworthiness requires action rather than omission. But this does not appear to be the ultimate explanation either. For the phenomenon still

arises in cases, like WOW, REAL PROVIDERS, in which the behavior under discussion is not a mere omission and instead involves careful planning and sustained effort over a lengthy period of time. Third: one might think that the phenomenon has something to do with fulfilling one's role-based obligations. But it is broader than that. For it still arises in cases, such as WOW, SUCH RESTRAINT, in which the behavior under discussion is behavior that we are all obligated to display toward everyone else at all times. (Indeed, some of the behaviors that elicit the slow-clap intuition most profoundly are behaviors that we are all obligated to display toward everyone at all times; we would be nonplussed and a little concerned, for instance, if someone were to announce approvingly that they or a third party had committed no murders throughout their whole life so far.)

## 2. The puzzle

We don't deserve praise for actions *simpliciter* — that is, not for simple sequences of bodily movements. Instead, when we deserve praise for our actions, it is in virtue of the good features that these actions have. In their surrounding context, certain sequences of bodily movements constitute doing something *kind*, or *generous*, or *honest*, or *fair*, and so on. These are the sorts of thing for which we can be praiseworthy.

Intuitively, some features of actions are simply not eligible to be that for which we are praiseworthy. Notably, the features of actions that we name with negatively-valenced moral terms all seem to be praise ineligible: we cannot be praiseworthy for the cruelty of an action, for instance, nor for its unfairness. (This is not to say that we can never be praiseworthy for an action that is in fact cruel or unfair; such an action may have other praise-eligible features and we may be praiseworthy for those features notwithstanding the concomitant cruelty or unfairness.) Nor can we deserve praise for an action's mere moral permissibility. Permissibility is plausibly necessary for praiseworthiness, but it is not sufficient. Someone can only be praiseworthy if her action has more going for it than that.

Moral rightness — understood not as mere permissibility, but as requirement or obligation — seems a prime candidate for being a praise-eligible feature. After all, we sometimes expend considerable effort in trying to ensure that our actions have this feature; we try to figure out what the right thing to do is when we are morally uncertain, and we try to get ourselves to go through with it when that we think we know what the right thing to do is but do not find it easy to do. Some of us also respond to uncertainty as to whether we are doing the right thing with unease or distress. It would be surprising if it turned out that we care so much about our actions' possessing a feature that is not even praise-eligible.

Moreover, there is now a sizable philosophical literature on moral worth, discussing the conditions under which someone deserves praise for acting rightly. It is a shared assumption within this literature that rightness is praise-eligible; the question at issue concerns the relationship that someone may or must have to her action's rightness in order for her to actually be praiseworthy for it. That rightness is praise-eligible is taken for granted by all parties. And this is not a baseless assumption; on the contrary, the literature is full of examples in which people intuitively *do* seem praiseworthy for acting rightly. Most people think that Huckleberry Finn is praiseworthy for acting rightly when he helps Jim to escape from the authorities,<sup>3</sup> that someone can be praiseworthy for acting rightly when she sees people drowning in a rushing river and dives in to save them, and so on. But if rightness looks like a property of actions for

<sup>3</sup>I actually don't think this. But I am very much in the minority.

which we can properly be praised in all these cases, then it is puzzling that it does not appear to be a property of actions for which we can properly be praised in slow-clap cases.

The disputants in the moral worth literature are disputing about the *epistemic and conative relationships* that someone must bear to the rightness of her action in order for her to actually be (or not be) praiseworthy for it. The chief debates concern whether someone can be praiseworthy for acting rightly despite being uncertain or mistaken about whether she is doing so and whether being praiseworthy for acting rightly requires that one is motivated by the very fact that one's action is right, by the further features of the action that ground its rightness, or either of those, or neither of those. But none of this epistemic and conative stuff explains the slow clap phenomenon. For we are free to stipulate whatever our preferred epistemic and conative relationships might be in slow-clap cases; for instance, we could stipulate that the conference attendees know that refraining from bullying the graduate student is morally required and do it for that very reason, or that they are moved directly by concern for the student with no thought of rightness, or that they are moved by direct concern for the student but disposed not to be so moved if they judge that this concern will lead them to act wrongly, or that they understand why refraining from bullying is right and are motivated both by its rightness and its right-making features, or whatever. It doesn't matter; the slow clap intuition remains regardless. Something else is driving it.

My hypothesis is that what is driving slow-clap intuitions is whatever we express by the term "mere" when we say that *merely* refraining from sexual harassment, feeding one's children each day, and refraining from gratuitously laying into nervous graduate students are not praiseworthy behaviors. The philosophical challenge, then, is to spell out what this "mereness" amounts to.

Again, we can quickly dispense with some too-simple accounts. One might initially think that mereness is *ubiquity*; we might say that these actions aren't praiseworthy because everyone in our moral community performs them and that an action must be sufficiently exceptional in order for it to be praiseworthy.<sup>4</sup> But that can't be right, because slow-clap behaviors need not be ubiquitous. It is not difficult to imagine a version of WOW, HOW GRACIOUS in which the conference is notorious for being a space in which people get nasty during Q&A. But, even in such a version of the case, pointing out approvingly that nobody bullied *this* nervous graduate student *this* time would still elicit a slow clap. For another example, imagine (or recall) a historical period during which it suddenly becomes trendy for public figures, institutions, and companies to issue public statements announcing that they do not condone racial discrimination. And suppose (or recall) that racial discrimination is in fact widespread at the time and that a significant proportion of the population is unperturbed by it. We might nonetheless have a slow clap reaction to these public pronouncements: "of course you don't condone racial discrimination!", we might say, exasperatedly. "Nobody should!".

This way of expressing the slow-clap intuition might suggest that mereness has to do with *obviousness* or *easiness*; we might say that these actions aren't praiseworthy because they're obviously morally required and easy to perform, and so, even if they aren't ubiquitous, they *should* be ubiquitous. I think that this is along the right lines. But even this is not yet quite right. For example, feeding one's children every day is not necessarily easy; whether it is so depends on what other responsibilities one is juggling and whether one struggles to afford food. And even mere omissions, like refraining from bullying, are not always

<sup>4</sup> Something a bit like this is suggested by Julia Markovits in an unpublished draft; Markovits (ms) holds that we take ourselves to have the standing to praise people only if we judge that most people in our moral community would not have had the fortitude to act as they did. My positive view, developed below, will be somewhat similar to Markovits' view except that it will be about *people who care adequately* rather than *most people in our moral*

easy. If the conference attendees were trained under conditions in which workplace bullying was richly socially rewarded, then their refraining from laying in to the graduate student might require breaking long-ingrained habits, which might not be at all easy. And if they are somewhat socially obtuse then they might also find it difficult to recognize their behavior as bullying; they may think that a “gotcha!” question cannot constitute bullying if it presents a genuine problem for someone’s view, for instance, or their frustration at the student’s failure to grasp the spirit of their objection may distract them to the point where they fail to notice the discomfort on her face as they ask their fourth follow-up. But it is not easy to refrain from doing something if you cannot tell whether you are doing it. Similarly, at least for *these* versions of the conference attendees, the moral status of their actions may not be at all obvious.

Let’s recap. We have seen that slow-clap behaviors need not be ubiquitous, obviously required, or easy to perform. Nonetheless, I have suggested that, intuitively, they *should* be ubiquitous. I think there is also a sense in which they *should* be both obvious and easy. This is basically what my positive view will amount to. So let’s get to that.

### 3. First diagnosis: varieties of rightness

I introduced our puzzle in terms of praise-eligible properties: rightness is usually praise-eligible, I said, but the agents in slow-clap cases do not seem praiseworthy for doing what is undeniably the right thing to do in their circumstances, no matter which epistemic and conative relationships they bear to their actions’ rightness. There are three ways to respond to this puzzle. First, one might try to deny the intuitive data: one might argue that the agents in slow-clap cases really *are* praiseworthy for acting rightly, at least under certain stipulations about their epistemic and conative states. I will not explore this response here — I’m just going to assume that no such theoretical backflips will be intuitively acceptable across all cases. Second, one might take slow-clap cases to show that there is more to someone S’s being praiseworthy for a feature F of her action besides F’s being praise-eligible and S’s bearing the right epistemic and conative relationships to her action’s F-ness. And, third, one might maintain that those two conditions are indeed individually necessary and jointly sufficient for S to be praiseworthy for acting F ly, but insist that the behaviors in slow-clap cases are morally right in a different sort of way from those in cases in which people seem praiseworthy for acting rightly. If the behaviors in slow-clap cases instantiate a different property from those in praiseworthy cases, then we can escape the puzzle by suggesting that the latter property is praise-eligible but the former is not.

I will ultimately take the second approach. But let me first say a bit about the third.

The term “right” is nebulous; it admits of different readings. Some people who say that they want “to do the right thing” take the definite description seriously, assuming that there is a unique course of action that is *morally required* in their circumstances and wanting to identify and perform it. Others use the term “right” in a looser sense that encompasses not only morally required action but also *supererogatory* action — i.e., action that is highly morally valuable but is not required in virtue of the significant personal risks or costs involved in its performance. Still others use the term “right” in an even looser sense that encompasses not only the required and the supererogatory but also the *merely permissible* — i.e., action that is neither required, nor supererogatory, nor impermissible, and as such is entirely optional from a moral point of view. In this third sense, saying that one wants to act rightly just amounts to saying that one wants not to act wrongly. Any other moral status is fine.

That having been said, it is not very plausible that the behaviors in slow-clap cases and those in praiseworthy cases have different moral statuses. On the contrary, these behaviors all seem to be morally

required. For the behaviors in slow-clap cases, for all their moral basic-ness, are clearly not optional. They are behaviors that it is impermissible *not* to display; it is impermissible to sexually harass people, to fail to feed your children, or to gratuitously bully nervous graduate students. But behaviors that is impermissible *not to display* are behaviors that are required. Similarly, many cases in which people intuitively seem praiseworthy for doing the right thing are cases in which their behavior is required. There are versions of river rescue cases in which the rescue is supererogatory, but there are also other versions — if the rescue is not all *that* dangerous, for instance, and/or if the passerby who performs it is a trained lifeguard — in which it is plausibly required. And the same goes for ordinary cases in which multiple morally significant things are at stake in the agent's circumstances and she must figure out how to carefully strike the right balance between them. In such cases we often assume that there is a uniquely morally optimal balance between the various considerations at stake, that the action that strikes this optimal balance is required, and that someone can be praiseworthy for acting rightly if she identifies and performs it (provided that she is in the appropriate epistemic and conative states for praiseworthiness, whatever we take those to be).

This is all bad news for the strategy of solving the puzzle by saying that behaviors in slow-clap cases and those in praiseworthy cases are right in different ways, such that the latter instantiate a praise-eligible property but the former do not. For if the property that we designate with the term "right" is the property of being morally required in both sets of cases, then it looks impossible for those in one set to instantiate a praise-eligible property while those in the other do not. One and the same property cannot be both praise-eligible and praise-ineligible.

Nor do there seem to be significant differences between the sorts of factors that explain *why* behaviors in slow-clap cases and those in praiseworthy cases are all required. Consider WOW, SUCH RESTRAINT and WOW, HOW GRACIOUS. In these cases the agents refrain from wronging other people. There is not much to be said in favor of the behaviors that would wrong people, save for the fact (if it is a fact) that they might advance the agents' own interests. And refraining is particularly important in WOW, HOW GRACIOUS in light of the agents' professional roles. But all of this is also exactly what explains why the river rescue is required in a version of the case in which it is moderately dangerous, but not all *that* dangerous, and in which the passerby is a trained lifeguard. Granted, it is true that the river rescue involves refraining from wronging-by-omission (i.e. not performing the rescue) whereas the slow-clap cases involve refraining from wronging-by-action (i.e. sexually harassing or bullying), but this is not a significant enough difference to dissolve the puzzle. Moreover, consider WOW, REAL PROVIDERS. This case involves actively doing stuff rather than refraining, as we observed earlier. In addition, because feeding one's children every day for a year involves careful planning and sustained effort over an extended period of time, this case will normally also involve repeated instances in which the parents have to juggle multiple morally significant things at stake in their circumstances so as to manage to feed their children every day without falling short with respect to any of the other many and varied things at stake. But this makes the case structurally similar to ordinary cases of careful balance-striking in which the agents do seem praiseworthy for doing the right thing.

All in all, then, it really does not seem as though we are talking about different moral properties when we say that behaviors in slow-clap cases and those in cases in which the agent is intuitively

praiseworthy for acting rightly are all morally right. The behaviors are morally required in both sets of cases. Nonetheless,

I think that there is still something to the idea that these two sets of behaviors are not right in the same sort of way. For there is something to the idea that they are not *required* in the same sort of way. As we observed earlier, slow-clap behaviors seem to be in some sense *morally basic*, which appears to be what stops them from being the sort of thing that can be praiseworthy (regardless of the quality of the agent's

epistemic and conative states). This suggests a picture according to which moral requirements subdivide into the basic and the non-basic. We might therefore say that the property of conforming to a *basic* moral requirement and the property of conforming to a *non-basic* moral requirement are distinct properties, and

that conforming to a basic moral requirement is praise-ineligible but conforming to a non-basic moral requirement is praise-eligible. To make sense of such a proposal, though, we would have to make sense of the intuitive *basic-ness*. It is to this that I now turn.

#### 4. Second diagnosis: adequate caring and effort

Philosophers who operate within the quality-of-will tradition often speak in terms of *adequate caring*. People are blameworthy, we say, for *caring inadequately* about that which is in fact morally significant — such as human well-being, honesty, and equality, and/or whatever else the true first-order moral theory identifies as morally significant.<sup>5</sup> And we now have fairly detailed accounts of the mental state of caring (here I follow Arpaly and Schroeder 2013, ch.6<sup>6</sup>): caring is a mental state that disposes the agent to think about the object of her care, to notice when it is relevant to what is going on around her, to be pleased when she learns that it is faring better than she expected and saddened when she learns that it is faring worse than expected, and to be motivated to do whatever she thinks will lead to its faring well and averse to doing whatever she thinks will lead to its faring badly. But, despite this detailed understanding of the nature of caring, we do not yet have anything like a clear account of what it is to care *adequately* about that which is in fact morally significant. In other work, I have argued that quality-of-will theorists should turn our attention to the project of articulating the standards for adequate caring. There are many issues to be settled here: whether the standards simply set thresholds for minimally adequate degrees of care for each morally significant thing or also include constraints on the relative degrees to which we care about different things, how finely or coarsely the standards grain these things, and so forth.

Here is an observation: the more one cares about something, the easier it is to muster the effort required to perform a course of action that one can tell promotes the thing one cares about. (I intend for the term “promote” to be read expansively here, such that promoting something is not necessarily a matter of increasing the total quantity of it in the world and instead can encompass whatever is the appropriate way to respond to morally significant things.) This is because caring has a motivational component. Even when a course of action is somewhat risky or costly, we can get ourselves to remain motivated to perform it by reminding ourselves of the things we care about that are at stake. And the more we care about the things we see at stake, the less of a struggle it will be to get ourselves to perform the action — holding fixed whatever risks or costs it carries. Indeed, sometimes the term “struggle” is inapt because no process describable as *struggling* or *getting ourselves* to do the thing occurs at all; when we care very much about something that is evidently at stake, our motivation to promote it can flow smoothly with nothing like an experience of internal tension. This is especially so when there is nothing much to be said for our alternative courses of action. When something that we care about very much is at stake in our taking a certain course of action and nothing that we care about is at stake in our refraining from it,

the decision to perform the action can seem like a *no-brainer*: that is, it can be something we don't even deliberate about, because its non-performance is not an option to which we are willing to give serious consideration.

<sup>5</sup>We might also be blameworthy for caring about what is in fact morally *disvaluable*, such as ill-being and secrecy and hierarchy. I will set this aside for the time being as it is irrelevant to what I am saying in this paper. <sup>6</sup>N.B. Arpaly and Schroeder's aim is to give an account of *good and ill will* in terms of *intrinsic desires and aversions*, with intrinsic desires understood in the manner in which I have described the mental state of caring. They do not put things in terms of caring; they put things in terms of good will. I take this difference to be merely terminological.

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Now, here is a hypothesis:

HYPOTHESIS: Behaviors elicit slow-clap reactions iff and because nobody who met the standards for adequate caring would struggle to muster the effort involved in performing them.

I said earlier that my hypothesis is that what drives slow-clap intuitions is whatever we express by the term "mere" when we say that *merely* refraining from sexual harassment, feeding one's children each day, and refraining from gratuitously laying into nervous graduate students are not praiseworthy behaviors. This is what I think it is that we express with the term "mere".

To clarify, the hypothesis says "struggle to muster the effort involved" rather than just "struggle" because there are all manner of ways in which people can struggle to perform actions that are independent of the degree to which they care about everything at stake. For example, I would struggle to beat a seasoned chess player even if my family's life were at stake, but that is just because my "understanding" of chess doesn't go far beyond knowing that the little horse moves in an L-shape. I would also struggle to throw a three-pointer even if you offered me a million dollars, because I don't know what a three-pointer is, although I'm pretty sure it has something to do with basketball. (N.B. I actually wrote "hit" instead of "throw" the first time I typed that last sentence — and I'm still not sure that "throw" is the correct verb). I'm also sure that, even if you patiently explained to me what a three-pointer is, I'd still struggle to throw it, because I've played very little basketball and I wouldn't be able to tell what to do with my muscles in order to get the thing to happen. But none of this manifests the degree to which I care about whatever is at stake in my winning at chess or throwing a three-pointer. On the contrary, none of this is deeply personally revelatory; it says nothing of my quality of will. It just reveals my lack of experience in playing chess and basketball, alongside the fact that one needs experience to learn how to play those games.

Not so for struggles to muster the effort involved in taking a particular course of action. This kind of struggle does reveal something about the agent's quality of will, thanks to the relationship between caring and motivation that we just discussed. Struggling to get oneself to perform a course of action when one sees that something morally significant is at stake does *not* necessarily mean that one cares inadequately about this thing; it could instead mean that something else morally significant is also at stake, pulling in the other direction, and so one is appropriately torn.<sup>7</sup> But it is an indictment of someone's quality of will if she struggles to get herself to perform a course of action when she can see that something highly morally significant is at stake and there is nothing of moral significance pulling in the other direction. And it is similarly an indictment of the agent's quality of will if she struggles to get herself to perform an action when she can see that something *highly* morally significant is at stake and the

considerations pulling in the other direction are *a little bit* morally significant, but they pale in comparison to the importance of the thing(s) that performing the action promotes. In these cases it is true to say that performing the action may not be easy, but it *should* be easy. Likewise, such actions *should* be ubiquitous. This is because people should care at least adequately about everything that is in fact morally significant.

<sup>7</sup>Cases like this are discussed in the literature on so-called “moral-moral conflict” in contemporary virtue ethics (see especially Baxley 2007, and cf. Stohr 2003). Some virtue ethicists hold that any internal struggle in getting oneself to perform what one sees is the (morally) best available option in one’s circumstances shows that one is not fully virtuous, since – the thought goes – a fully virtuous person’s motivations and moral judgments are perfectly aligned. But the literature on moral-moral conflict questions the generality of this thesis. When someone faces a complex case in which genuine moral considerations count against the course of action that is morally best overall, some authors say that it is in fact a mark of virtue for the agent to feel torn and regretful about taking this course of action.

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Doing so is a prerequisite of meeting the standards for adequate caring. And, given the ways in which caring affects motivation, people who care adequately about everything morally significant will not struggle to muster the effort involved in performing actions with this sort of massively unbalanced moral profile. These actions will feel like no-brainers.

I think that this hypothesis provides a satisfying explanation of our slow-clap intuitions about my initial three cases. Return to WOW, SUCH RESTRAINT and WOW, HOW GRACIOUS. In these cases, as we observed earlier, the agents refrain from behaviors that would wrong people and that have little in their favor save for the fact (if it is a fact) that they might advance the agents’ own interests. These, then, are cases in which something highly morally significant is at stake and there is nothing of moral significance pulling in the other direction – advancing one’s interests can arguably sometimes be morally valuable, but it is not so in these cases. Morally speaking, then, restraint should be a no-brainer in both cases. Someone who cared adequately about people’s well-being, about respect, about their professional roles, and so on, would be unwilling to give serious consideration to the possibility of sexually harassing someone or bullying a nervous grad student even if doing so would advance their own interests. Similarly, consider WOW, REAL PROVIDERS. As we observed earlier, this case will normally involve repeated instances in which the parents have to juggle multiple morally significant things at stake in their circumstances so as to manage to feed their children every day without falling short with respect to any of the other many and varied things at stake in their lives over the course of a year. Nonetheless, the importance of feeding one’s children is *highly* morally significant. Most of the other morally significant things that the parents have to juggle will pale in comparison to the importance of feeding one’s children. Moreover, there are lots of ways to feed one’s children – one can cook for them, make them a packed lunch, give them money to buy food at the cafeteria, and so on – and so there are lots of ways to combine feeding one’s children with meeting one’s sundry other obligations. People who care adequately about their children’s welfare and about their roles as parents may well deliberate about *how* to feed their children, considering different ways to fit that task in alongside everything else they’ve got going on. But they will not deliberate about *whether* to feed their children. Again, the thought that they have to get this done one way or another will feel like a no-brainer.

It is possible – rare, but possible – for a parent to be confronted with something of such profound and urgent moral importance that it might actually take priority over ensuring that their children get fed that day. In this case, the analysis I just gave does not apply. But *this is not a slow-clap case*. We would usually have the slow-clap reaction upon hearing that someone had fed their children every day for a year, but, if we later learned that they had managed to do this in a context of severe moral crisis, then the slow-clap

intuition would evaporate. Intuitively, such an agent might actually be praiseworthy for feeding their children every day after all. This is entirely consistent with my hypothesis, since this is not a case in which nobody who met the standards for adequate caring would struggle to muster the effort involved in feeding their children. On the contrary, even people who meet the standards for adequate caring might occasionally struggle to muster the effort involved in feeding their children every day whilst in a context of severe moral crisis – since the crisis, if it is severe enough, might sometimes take priority.

Something similar holds of cases in which the agent struggles to perform the relevant behavior in a way that is unrelated to the degree to which she cares about everything at stake. For example, if we learned that a parent had to work three jobs in order to be able to afford food for their children, or that their country was invaded by a power-hungry oligarch and the family became refugees, then we would no longer have slow-clap reactions to the news that they had managed to feed their children every day for the past year. Again, this is entirely consistent with my hypothesis, since these are cases in which people who meet the standards for adequate caring might struggle to feed their children for reasons that are

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wholly unrelated to their quality of will. Part of the tragedies of poverty and war is that they can impose severe hardships even on people whose levels of moral concern are positively saintly, with the result that even meeting their basic moral obligations – as well as their own basic needs – becomes a struggle.

I have discussed the sense in which slow-clap behaviors *should* be easy. But I hinted earlier that there is also a sense in which the fact that they are morally required *should* be obvious (even if it is not, in fact, obvious to the obtuse agent). I am now in a position to spell that out. To begin, recall that the relationship between caring and motivation depends on the agent seeing that what she cares about is at stake in her circumstances. It is similarly true that someone will see an action as a no-brainer only if she recognizes that what is at stake is way more important than what pulls in the other direction and that the latter pales by comparison. Now, it is not plausible that the standards for adequate caring require moral omniscience. One must be able to count as caring adequately about something even if one cannot tell *precisely* what it consists in and *precisely* what its relative degree of moral importance is in comparison with everything else. Some uncertainty on this front is compatible with adequate caring. But there are limits. For example, plausibly, one does not count as caring adequately about world peace if one thinks that world peace might be less important than one's scarf. And one does not count as caring adequately about world peace if one thinks that world peace is compatible with world war; in this latter case, one fails to grasp the nature of peace and therefore cannot care about *it*. Collectively, these observations help to identify the sense in which it should be obvious that slow-clap behaviors are morally required. What is going on is that anyone who cared adequately about everything that is in fact morally significant would recognize what is at stake, and would recognize its moral importance at least well enough to see that the considerations on the other side pale by comparison (or do not exist at all, if there is nothing to be said for the alternative to the slow-clap behavior). Or, to rephrase the point, what is going on is that anyone who *failed* to recognize what is at stake or who was so uncertain or mistaken about its importance that she was unsure whether the slow-clap behavior is morally required would be someone who cares inadequately.

My hypothesis, if correct, has a useful payoff. The payoff is that we can use slow-clap intuitions to make progress toward identifying the content of the standards for adequate caring. That is because, if my hypothesis is correct, then our having a slow-clap intuition about a certain sort of behavior indicates that nobody who met the standards for adequate caring would struggle to muster the effort involved in performing the behavior. This tells us that the moral considerations against the behavior (if any exist) pale into insignificance in comparison to the considerations that explain why it is required, to the point

where someone's failing to identify the latter considerations or being uncertain as to whether they are more important than the former would imply that they fail to care adequately. Part of what the standards for adequate caring require, then, is that we identify the moral considerations that explain why slow-clap behaviors are required and that we are sure enough of their moral importance to realize that the countervailing considerations in slow-clap cases cannot hold a candle to them. That's the epistemic side of things.<sup>8</sup> There is also a motivational side of things. To wit: the standards for adequate caring require not only that we recognize what is at stake in slow-clap cases and recognize that what is at stake is far more morally significant than whatever considerations (if any) pull in the opposite direction, but also that we are motivated accordingly – to the point where we experience no internal struggle in getting ourselves to take these courses of action.

<sup>8</sup> There is a lively literature on blameworthy moral ignorance, in which philosophers have traded intuitions about whether various instances of moral ignorance are themselves blameworthy (independent of the blameworthiness of any wrongful actions performed as a result of the ignorance). My hypothesis can help us to make progress in this literature by identifying the instances of moral ignorance that are so egregious as to reveal inadequate caring.

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This will not be enough to pin down a uniquely optimal precise degree of motivation that one must have toward each thing that is in fact morally significant. But it sets some minimal constraints on the relative *degrees* to which we must care about different things in order to care adequately. For each slow-clap case, our degree of concern for that which explains why the relevant behavior is required should exceed our degrees of concern for whatever pulls in the opposite direction to such a degree that the action feels like a no-brainer.

## 5. Conclusion

TBD

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