# Cultural Dynamics, Moral Ignorance, and a Plausible Response to Immoral Acts

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Abstract. I examine the plausibility that culture may induce moral ignorance to mitigate or vitiate blameworthiness. I show how culturally induced moral ignorance may explain and provide an excuse, but not a justification for, terrorist acts, and how a recognition of their moral ignorance and the basis for it, may indicate the proper moral response to extremist Islamic terrorism. I argue that Moody-Adams' criticisms of culturally induced moral ignorance fail to consider how the brainwashing processes, false beliefs, and the closed nature of oppressive cultures may vitiate an epistemic requirement for blameworthiness. I argue that we cannot assume, as Moody-Adams did, that because relevant moral facts are out there, and because people are rationally capable of knowing those facts and reflecting on their cultural principles as the basis for their actions, when they act immorally, it is because they simply refused to know the relevant moral facts or chose not reflect on their cultural principles.
Keywords: moral ignorance, oppressive culture, brainwashing, affected ignorance, responsibility, blameworthiness

## INTRODUCTION

Extremist Islamic terrorists have committed atrocities that many Muslims and non-Muslims find morally reprehensible. These terrorists are obviously not insane, irrational, or evil. They are clearly logical in their planning, and they are obviously moral toward some people. How do we explain and respond to their actions? One option is to characterize them as evil, and then seek to destroy them. Some argue that, as a practical or theoretical issue, this approach is wrong-headed. They argue that the more they are struck, the more they are able to recruit people, and the more we perpetuate the religious environment and processes that create like-minded terrorists. The other option is to try to understand their extremist doctrines, false beliefs about the West, oppressive cultural environment, and the processes of brainwashing that "created" these terrorists, and then, try to see their actions in the context of their cultural-religious

upbringing and the impediments this upbringing creates. Such understanding will lead to rational engagement and the efforts to bring about changes in the internal dynamics of their culture. These two options raise ethical issues of blameworthiness, how to respond to widespread immoral acts, and the philosophical basis for culturally induced moral ignorance as a source of widespread ignorance and some immoral acts.

The issue of culturally induced moral ignorance has a heuristic value regarding how we respond to the problems of Islamic extremism, terrorism, and oppressive cultures. The second option is given credence by a commonplace attitude: "Forgive them, for they know not what they do," which recognizes that the phenomenon of moral ignorance may vitiate or mitigate blameworthiness, provide an explanatory excuse, and basis for forgiveness. I do not in any way seek to provide a justification for such acts. The implication of this idea for how we deal with terrorists is controversial. It means we must critically examine the extent to which terrorists, as moral agents, are blameworthy. Is it plausible that they are morally ignorant? Can one reasonably argue that their religious-cultural upbringing has induced some kind of moral ignorance? When their fundamentalist false beliefs are placed in the context ofthe illiberally oppressive and closed culture, andtheir processes of brainwashing, is it plausible that they are unable to know relevant facts and reason properly to arrive at the correct moral conclusion about certain matters? If this is plausible, then some of the epistemic conditions for ascribing moral responsibility in the "internalist sense" are vitiated. If they are vitiated, then are they morally blameworthy? To what extent? Is their blameworthiness mitigated by their cultural impediment?

## THE PROBLEM OF CULTURALLY INDUCED MORAL IGNORANCE

Let us suppose that extremist Islamic terrorists have religious-culturally induced moral ignorance, which may lead one to say, "forgive them, for they know not what they do". This will raise philosophical questions about the nature, implication, or basis for such response. Does this response make sense? For some, it does not, because their moral intuition tells them that terrorists are evil and they should be destroyed. This intuition appears inconsistent with some moral views of how one ought to respond to immoral acts, which suggests the second option,

namely, since they may not know what they are doing, let's forgive them and help them out of their ignorance. The focus of this paper is on the idea of culturally induced moral ignorance as a basis for forgiveness and mitigating a terrorist's blameworthiness. I seek a philosophical basis to make sense of: "they know not what they do," by suggesting that the religious-cultural upbringing of terrorists is one plausible source of widespread moral ignorance among them.

Michele Moody-Adams (1990, 1994, 1997a) rejects the view that culture may induce moral ignorance and vitiate or mitigate responsibility. She argues that if one is rational and can be encultured to internalize cultural principles, then one is responsible for the action based on those principles. The view that culturally induced ignorance may vitiate blameworthiness implies that cultures can create impediments to responsible moral agency, such that widespread moral ignorance may be attributed to cultural limitations and not individuals' moral defect. She rejects this view for the following reasons:

(1) it rules out culpable moral ignorance in the face of cultural impediments.

(2) Many cases of moral ignorance are not cases of genuine ignorance but cases of "affected ignorance" in which people simply refuse or choose not to know what they ought to know.

(3) The enduring and self-corrective nature of culture implies that it is unreasonable to say that cultural upbringing can create a situation where a person is unable to know right and wrong.

(4) The ability to act, develop one's character, and have desires and interests, indicate that a person can be cultured. This means that she can rationally adopt cultural principles as a basis for action, which indicates that she is a rational agent who is able to critically examine and revise such principles.

I take issue with Moody-Adams' views, and I examine the following questions: What are the philosophical and ethical bases for giving credence to the plausibility that moral ignorance may mitigate or vitiate blameworthiness to engender forgiveness? How is it plausible for cultures to induce moral ignorance? I argue that Moody-Adams' (1990, 1994, 1997a) criticisms of culturally induced moral ignorance fail to consider important pedagogical elements about the enculturation processes of oppressive cultures involving brainwashing. I examine how these elements may vitiate some epistemic conditions for ascribing blameworthiness. We cannot assume that because relevant moral facts are out there,

and because people are rational and capable of knowing those facts and reflecting on cultural principles as the basis for their actions, when they do not know and act immorally, it is because they refused to know or do critical reflection. People may be rendered relatively practically incapable by their culture, of knowing relevant facts or understanding some principles. Thus, given their cultural--moral, religious, and epistemic--principles and relevant facts as their premises, they may be unable to arrive at the proper conclusion in their reasoning regarding the moral wrongness of certain actions.

One essential condition for blameworthiness in an "internalist sense" (from an agent's perspective) involves the rational requirement that, a person must be aware of the moral wrongness of her action. This implies that the person is a moral agent, in that she is autonomous, able to know right and wrong, and able to use such knowledge as a rational basis for acting voluntarily. One is ascribed responsibility in an "externalist sense" (from an evaluator's perspective), if, (1) one is rational, autonomous, and able to know right and wrong, and (2) one's action is, in fact, morally wrong. This externalist sense involves objective conditions for ascribing responsibility that one may not be aware of. So, if one is not aware of the moral wrongness of an action, and makes reasonable but futile efforts to be aware, then one is still responsible. Moody-Adams' view suggests that responsibility ought to be ascribed in an externalist sense. This is the basis for her view that many putative cases of culturally induced moral ignorance are cases of affected ignorance. Ascribing moral responsibility in an externalist sense is problematic, in that the epistemic condition of being aware of the moral wrongness at the time of one's action may be absent.

A moral agent is usually morally ignorant only relative to certain matters. Hence, the problem of moral ignorance arises – and is philosophically interesting – only in situations where the conditions for moral agency are satisfied. Being a moral agent implies that one is not morally ignorant across the board. The problems of moral ignorance and responsibility do not arise for people who are completely ignorant across the board, due to senility, infancy, and insanity. They do not meet the requirements for moral agency, are not considered moral agents, and thus not blameworthy. Moral ignorance about relevant issues implies that the epistemic and intention requirements for ascribing responsibility are absent. A moral agent, X, is blameworthy, only if, (1) X's action is

morally wrong based on a morally bad outcome or motive or both, and (2) X is aware of the moral wrongness of her action or is practically able and capable of being aware but chose not to. The processes and principles of a culture – whether it is oppressiveand employs extreme brainwashing techniques – are relevant to the issue of genuine moral ignorance and blameworthiness. It is a commonplace view that extremist fundamentalist religions usually brainwash their members and prevent them from being aware – in a robust sense – of the wrongness of their actions. By not allowing alternative relevant information, culture may inhibit a robust sense of knowledge or awareness.

To say that cultures can induce the practical inability of some people to know right from wrong in a robust sense does not imply that cultures can render them absolutely unable to function as moral agents. So, cultural impediments do not induce moral ignorance across the board. Therefore, identifying some instances in which people are not morally ignorant does not imply that they are not morally ignorant in other instances. A morally ignorant person is only practically unable to know right and wrong contextually, relative to the cultural principles, beliefs, or meta-beliefs that she uses as the premises in her reasoning, in virtue of which she arrives at conclusions about actions, decisions, intentions, or motives. These premises, which include fundamental cultural and religious beliefs, and epistemic meta-beliefs, also determine the limits and scope of one's knowledge, reasoning, and whether or not one can critically reflect on one's principles or freely inquire about alternatives.

According to a less controversial anthropological view, culture represents a set of procedures, principles, values, practices, expectations, and beliefs that people acquire or internalize in society regarding how people live or ought to live. A culture involves a social context that circumscribes one's alternatives and shapes rational choices. Hence, culture is seen by some people as a precondition for one's rational life plan (Kymlicka, 1989: 163-81). Culture may also be seen as a primary good and a social precondition for self-respect, self-esteem, and character. For Moody-Adams (1997b), culture is necessary for one's ability to have a sense of self-worth and, to see one's rational life plan and interest as valuable and worth pursuing; it is also essential for one's ability to have confidence in oneself to act in particular ways in pursuit of such plan. In Kymlicka's (1989, 1995) view, cultural structures provide and circumscribe life-plan options and the ability to reflect on and make sense of

them; they give people their sense of value, in virtue of which their options and choices make sense. For him, "Cultures are valuable, not in and of themselves, but because it is only through having access to a societal culture that people have access to a range of meaningful options" (Kymlicka, 1995: 83). As such, we are genuinely ignorant about the options that a cultureprevents or render meaningless. An action based on such ignorance is not blameworthy.

Moody-Adams accepts that people are influenced by the culture in which they are raised because they internalize the normative social patterns of behaviors imparted on them. In her view, being human involves being cultured, and this involves internalizing culturally accepted principles, using them to rational guide conduct, and making mistakes as result of human failing. In Moody-Adams' (1994) view,

> A culture may be thought of as the way of life of a given social group, that will be shaped by more or less intricate patterns of normative expectations about emotion, thought, and action. These patterned expectations will typically take the form of social rules that give distinctive shape to the group's practices. (Moody-Adams, 1994: 294-5)

Culture involves rational procedures that focus on "the formative importance of enculturation as initiation into culturally shaped patterns of beliefs, emotion, and action" (Moody-Adams, 1997a: 82). It is necessary for people to develop their character, in terms of the "interlocking set of relatively consistent patterns of thought, emotion, and action that develops and persists because of the role it plays in sustaining one in a way of life" (Moody-Adams, 1990: 128).

Cultural patterns shape character and agency, in the sense that "every culture develops intricate patterns of normative expectations about emotions, thought, and action – expectations that not only help structure each person's formative experiences but also help to shape many of the fundamental desires and purposes that influence action" (Moody-Adams, 1997a: 83). For her, cultures do not make one's character and action predictable. People usually reflect on cultural principles in the process of using them to form their character, which then shapes behavior. Moreover, people also reflect on substantive cultural principles based on other fundamental cultural principles and epistemic meta-principles. Moody-Adams provides anabstract ideal account of culture that is inherently rational and liberal in its processes and principles. This view does

not adequately reflect extremely oppressive cultures and their brainwashing processes of enculturation that could be ignorance-inducing. As such, her view rules out the oppressive sub-cultures of extreme fundamentalist Islam as legitimate cultures. The illiberal dynamics and oppressive nature of a culture and processes of enculturation will prevent people's practical ability to be robustly aware of moral wrongness with respect to certain matters.

Many accounts have indicated that the brainwashing that goes on in the Madrasas make children – who sometimes grow up to be adult terrorists – to be practically unable to reason properly about right and wrong with respect some matters. Oppressive cultures engender moral ignorance by creating a situation where one does not have the facilities to acquire adequate reasoning abilities, rational beliefs, alternative belief and principles, and character traits that one needs to act properly in accordance with the right moral principle. Such people lack the background beliefs and the relative reasoning abilities in the circumstance to fully understand the contents and implications of their principles to indicate a lack of robust knowledge of moral right or wrong. My contention is that an oppressive culture that brainwashes people may vitiate or mitigate responsibility if such culture fails to provide or allow the proper social facilities, rational processes, true beliefs, and normative expectations, or if it prevents one from having the alternative principles and beliefs necessary for enhancing one's epistemic state, expanding one's moral views, as well as the cognitive abilities needed to know and understand morally relevant facts and principles. The relevant social facilities may include those that help one to articulate one's conception of good, self, and rational life plans. Such facilities and conception also help one to build one's character, self-esteem and respect that form the basis for one's view, in virtue of which one may understand moral wrong or right, and act.

Extreme fundamentalist Islam and its processes of brainwashing, which may breed terrorists and terrorist acts like suicide bombing, represent an oppressive culture. It is doubtful whether many of these terrorists have a healthy or meaningful sense of self-esteem, self-worth, self-respect or rational life plans beyond what they have been brainwashed to believe. It is also doubtful whether they are able to rationally reflect on their terrorist acts and the underlying principles or beliefs by examining alternatives. Why would a person choose to blow

up himself? How do we reasonably explain or excuse this? If the commonplace view of the Madrasas in the extremist Islamic sub-culture is reasonable, then one may argue that the religious-cultural upbringing of terrorists has rendered them practically unable to know right from wrong about certain (not all) matters regarding their terrorist acts, such that they are not blameworthy. Michael Slote (1982), Alan Donagan (1977), and Susan Wolf (1987), argue for a similar view. Slote analyzes how the Greek culture culminated in the inability of slave owners to see the wrongness of slavery. Wolf analyzes the social circumstances that led people to own slaves in the 1850's and the Nazis' situation of the 1930's, and some male chauvinists of our fathers' generation.

Donagan analyzes the Nazi "culture" and the obligation of military officers trained in that culture. Are there epistemic or reasoningimpediments underlying the cultural processes that the Madrasas and Nazi culture may illustrate? Perhaps, these elements, whichinvolve false beliefs about the object of hatred, the extremely coercive environment, and irrational processes of acquiring the false beliefs, mayindicate some connection between oppressive cultures and moral ignorance in a way that mitigates responsibility. Because oppressive cultures can strongly and unconsciously shape people to engage in immoral act, it is reasonable to argue that the blameworthiness of those raised in such culture could be mitigated or vitiated in relevant cases, especially when compared to those raised in liberal cultures that allow people to engage in critical reflection in order to expand their options and the scope of their abilities to reflect. In Donagan's view, there is a difference in the responsibility of those soldiers who are trained in the oppressive culture of Nazi Germany and those trained in the liberal cultures of West Point and Sandhurst. In the former, people were mostly indoctrinated, brainwashed, or coerced, and the cultural mechanisms placed stringent limits on the scope of people's rational abilities, in terms of their options and how they utilize principles. In the latter case, people are rationally educated and allowed wide latitudes in their options and ability to critically reflect and rationally utilize principles.

So, the pertinent issues are: (1) whether it is reasonable to argue that oppressive cultures may induce genuine moral ignorance. And if it is reasonable, then (2) whether we can fully ascribe blame in the context of such ignorance. Moody-Adams argues that being encultured involves

being able to act rationally, morally, and responsibly in accordance with one's character and cultural principles. It also involves being able to sometimes act out of character due to human failings, which may lead one to engage in critical self-correction. In her view, "being *encultured* is a condition of the possibility of responsible agency" (Moody-Adams, 1994: 304); thus, a person's character is not (pre)determined by a culture (Moody-Adams, 1990: 111-31). For her, a defensible view of culture and the connection between culture and agency implies that there cannot be cultural limitations that can vitiate or mitigate responsibility.

The ability to adopt an "internal point of view" toward social rules is central to the life of a cultural group. This perspective involves a commitment by members to accept certain rules; it involves a willingness to see them as an authoritative basis for action and to use them as guide for conduct. This idea is the driving force in the oppressive extreme fundamentalist Islamic sub-culture. People in a culture use this viewpoint as a basis for expecting and demanding conformity with rules, and for criticizing those who disobey them. People engage in rational critical reflection, see shortcomings in their rules, and modify them from such viewpoint. This point of view is also used to perpetuate the false and unreasonable principles. And people are usually initiated into cultural principles and practices from this internal perspective, and Madrassas provides one process of initiation in this terrorist sub-culture.

## CRITICAL REFLECTION ON MOODY-ADAMS' VIEW OF CULTURE

For Moody-Adams, if people are capable of adopting an internal point of view as a relevant aspect of their culture, then it would be difficult, if not impossible, to rationally defend a plausible view of culturally induced moral ignorance. She argues that, cases of culturally induced moral ignorance are usually cases of *affected ignorance*: this "is essentially a matter of choosing not to be informed of what we can and should know" (Moody-Adams, 1994: 301), and "sometimes it simply involves refusing to consider whether some practice in which one participates might be wrong" (Moody-Adams, 1997a: 101). Such refusal implies a deliberate decision to be ignorant, a case of culpable moral ignorance, which does not vitiate the epistemic requirement for responsibility. She argues that those who defend the plausibility of culturally induced moral ignorance

must show that one's inability to know right from wrong is, indeed, a result of one's culture involves genuine ignorance that can mitigate or vitiate responsibility. The difficulty of acting in the right way, of acknowledging past wrongs, of engaging in self-criticism, and of overcoming the refusal to know, does not imply one's inability to know, or a justification to act based on ignorance. She argues that moral ignorance cannot be established solely on the basis of simple anthropological empirical facts regarding the connection between agency and culture, in terms of the ability of culture to influence one's character and agency.

The plausible argument for culturally induced moral ignoranceseeks to establish that some cultures are oppressive, illiberal, and have inherently false fundamental beliefs or principles and extreme processes of indoctrination. Such cultures fail to provide relevant alternative beliefs and processes that allow for robust critical reflection. As such, the culture's processes and fundamental beliefs strongly shape people's other beliefs and reasoning, to the extent of preventing the acquisition of true beliefs and good reasoning, thus, inducing genuine moral ignorance. Such cultures make it practically impossible or extremely difficult for one to know what one ought to know, which is logically possible for one to know. Such moral ignorance indicates that one necessary epistemic condition for blameworthiness is absent. Thus, one can argue on purelya priori grounds, for the view that culturally induced ignorance may vitiate or mitigate blameworthiness, by conceptually analyzing the illiberal and oppressive nature and the brainwashing processes of a culture, and showing how such culture and its oppressive processes and principles prevent the acquisition of true and alternative beliefs, shape or enhance the acquisition of false beliefs, formation of character, reasoning, and agency.

One can show how oppressive cultural factors that are irrationally internalized may to vitiate proper agency, by indicating how human actions, as conclusions, are derived from culturally shaped conceptual schemes, false principles and beliefs, false evidence, false conception of primary good and life-plan, which constitute the premises in one's reasoning. If the cultural norms that provide the basis for one's conceptual scheme, principles, and beliefs are faulty, then they will lead to faulty reasoning and actions.

If one can establish a strong connection between oppressive cultural principles or false beliefs and human reasoning or action, then the following issues must be addressed:

(1) Whether what Moody-Adams considers to be affected ignorance is a blatant conscious refusal or choice not to know, or whether it is a genuine case of moral ignorance, based on the practical inability to know relevant moral facts or acquire true beliefs, because of one's oppressive cultural principles, beliefs, and processes.

(2) Whether the idea of affected ignorance, where people simply refuse to be aware of some facts, can settle the theoretical issue of the plausibility of culturally induced moral ignorance.

(3) Whether all cases of affected ignorance necessarily imply blameworthiness, especially, if there are other compelling reasons within the culture for choosing not to be aware. Such reasons may be found in the practical expectations, sanctions, threats, pressure, and the cultural principles of inquiry that circumscribe the limits and scope of one's rational abilities, one's available knowledge, and how they are used. This means that we must examine how and why rational people may deliberately refuse or choose not to be aware of relevant facts to engender affected ignorance.

Culture can induce widespread moral ignorance because it is as an important element of one's conceptual scheme and the social and pragmatic context of one's beliefs and available evidence. Human actions are based on knowledge (or ignorance) and practical rationality, and they have important pragmatic and social-cultural dimensions. These dimensions, which may have oppressive and illiberal features usually circumscribe what is meaningful or valuable for us to know, and what we are practically able to know. As such, people cannot be expected to know what is not practically relevant or available as widespread knowledge in their social-cultural context (Cohen, 1987; Harman, 1980). As Dretske (1981) argues, knowledge (or ignorance), is relational and contextual, in that its stands in relation to what counts as available evidence and relevant alternatives for people given their social-cultural context, accepted beliefs, and fundamental principles. Moody-Adams ignores the plausibility of the idea that, given the social and pragmatic dimensions of knowledge, the fact that moral ignorance is widespread may be a prima facie good reason to think that it is not affected ignorance.

The existence of widespread moral ignorance within oppressive and illiberal cultures may indicate genuine ignorance. To suggest that such a situation creates affected ignorance, as opposed to genuine ignorance, is to imply that people have conspired and colluded to refuse to know what they practically are capable of knowing and ought to know in the proper environment. It is highly unlikely that many people will, at the same time, deliberately refuse to know what they ought to know, without other explanatory reasons beyond deliberate choice or refusal.

Such explanation may lie in the epistemic and meta-principles of a culture, the social and pragmatic dimensions of evidence, in terms of what is socially available or relevant, and the irrational acculturation (brainwashing) processes, which prevent people from critically examining ideas or some of their cultural principles. The existence of these factors is the basis for the commonplace view that different cultures, circumstances, and times may shape people's character and motivations, which are explanatory factors for their actions or excuses. Moody-Adams gives credence to this commonsense view, which indicates that it is only fair that we judge people by the standards of their time, place, or circumstance (Moody-Adams, 1994: 298). She accepts this view because she thinks that cultural principles and processes do influence human actions and provide a basis for explaining or excusing them. So, genuine moral ignorance may be due to social epistemic factors that go beyond an individual's failure orrefusal to know what they can or should know.

Moody-Adams insists that affected ignorance usually derives, not from inability, but from the difficulty to admit one's own fault and the difficulty involved in critically examining problematic cultural principles. She argues that affected ignorance may take different forms, including not being informed about relevant facts, choosing to ignore relevant facts, actively refusing to accept obvious relevant facts, and refusing to pay attention to the plights or views of others, which provide relevant evidence. These are sources or forms of morally culpable ignorance because people make a deliberate choice not to know morally important facts, which are easy to know if one does not make a deliberate choice not to know (Moody-Adams, 1997a: 101-2). She argues that people who hold the view that culturally induced moral ignorance may vitiate or mitigate responsibility "confuse the difficulty of altering, revising, or resisting characteristic patterns of behavior with an inability to do so" (Moody-Adams, 1990: 128). Her argument relies heavily on the logical

distinction between difficulty and inability, and the idea that difficulty does not imply inability. Thus, she argues: the mere fact that it is difficult for one to do something does not imply that one is unable to do it. The problem with the illiberal oppressive culture of the extreme Islamic terrorists is that everyone seems to have the same ideas or views, and there are no other or alternative views to pay attention to. Moody-Adams seems not to appreciate this. Thus, this situation, in my view, is not a case of difficulty but the practical ability to have knowledge and reason.

Moody-Adams makes a false strict logical distinction between "difficulty" and "inability". There are various degrees of difficulty with respect to certain issues. Some degrees of difficulty may involve inability. Trying to do something that one is ideally able to do, may, in some practical situations, involve unreasonable harm or excruciating pain and suffering. The extraordinary efforts that one must make in such situations indicate that the degree of difficulty has reached a level of inability. One cannot meaningfully be characterized as being able to do that thing in such situations. There are things that one is logically or ideally able to do which one is practically unable to do in certain situations. For instance, logically, I may be able to run a marathon, but practically, I am unable to, not because I have a medical condition or physical disability, but because I have not trained and do not have the stamina. However, a person may construe my practical inability in this situation to be a mere difficulty', and a case of my refusal or choice not to stretch myself and to endure the physical pain of running a marathon. However, given the right environment, time, and situation where I am able to train and have the stamina, I will be able to run a marathon. But if I find myself in a situation where for various legitimate practical constraints, I cannot train to build my stamina, it will be unreasonable to say that I simply chose not to run, and that I am construing the difficulty in the situation as a kind of inability. My choice not to run in this situation is reasonable and excusable.

Suppose my choice not to run leads to bad consequences: the race was meant to raise money for my friend's life-saving surgery, but because of my "refusal" to run, the fund-raiser failed. This consequence is something I neither intended nor foresaw – I could not have known. Am I blameworthy for the situation? The situation I found myself, which is analogous in significant respects to cultural constraints, rendered me

practically unable to do the thing I logically can do if the situation is appropriate. Given the right context and facilities, one could move from a situation of practical inability, to various degrees of difficulty, to having the ability to do something. The fact that one is logically able to do something does not imply that one is practically able to do it. Hence, it is unreasonable to use an objective externalist moral or epistemic requirement for blameworthiness because it is not sensitive to the subjective epistemic conditions and social processes and context of an agent and action. The heuristic value of recognizing cultural contexts and the problems of culturally induced moral ignorance involves determining the appropriate cultural processes, principles, and contexts that may inhibit one's abilities or create various degrees of inabilities or difficulties, and how they can be eliminated. There is no strict logical distinction between practical inability and difficulty but only various degrees of inability or difficulty depending on the situation. Because of theinfluence of beliefs, principles, and brainwashing processes, illiberal oppressive cultures, can and do create practical constraints that make one practically unable to know or do the things they normally can do.

For Moody-Adams, one is responsible for one's actions because one is responsible for the accepted cultural principles – that one can modify or reject – which then motivate the actions. In my view, a person who rationally accepts the fundamental principles of his culture – if he is not pressured, brainwashed, or indoctrinated – is responsible for those specific principles, which based on what he knows at the time, he rationally, reflectively, knowingly, and voluntarily accepts. But is he responsible for the actions that those principles motivate, which he could not foresee? For instance, by internalizing the propaganda or beliefs of a terrorist group or culture, does a suicide bomber know that such internalization will eventually make him suicide bomber, such he responsible? In the case of extreme Islamic terrorist culture, most people are brainwashed, indoctrinated or coerced; sometimes, there are no alternative principles. When someone internalizes cultural principles, he cannot know at the time of internalization, what those "internalized" cultural principles may motivate. As such, a terrorist from this kind of situation is not responsible for the unknown morally wrong act that derives from the principles he is coerced or brainwashed to internalize. When one "internalizes" cultural principles, one cannot know that such

principles will, thereafter, render one unable to see the true moral status of the implied or motivated actions.

My point is that the oppressive sub-culture of Islamic fundamentalism, extremism, and terrorism, and its processes of brainwashing make some people practically unable reason and act properly, because they lack the proper principles, true beliefs, enabling environment. The commonplace view is that the brainwashing in Madrasas, social pressure, coercion, poverty, lack of opportunity, and hopelessness in the cultures have engendered in some people various degrees of inabilities to reason and act properly that have led them to engage in terrorist activities. It is likely that if these people were raised in a different environment with the relevant true beliefs and proper principles, they will be practically able to reason and act properly, in terms of avoiding terrorism. Some cases of moral ignorance that Moody-Adams calls affected ignorance are cases where the relevant situations are inappropriate or the relevant situations are unavailable. As such, the situations render people practically unable to be aware of what, logically, they ought to be aware of, if the situations were appropriate. People have different abilities and they may experience different degrees of difficulties or inabilities with respect to different things in different situations.

The fact that people have the relevant abilities to know right from wrong does not imply that such abilities will necessarily have the right environment to be developed and used properly. Moody-Adams accepts that lack of appropriate environment may make the development of one's abilities and their use practically impossible, irrespective of an individual's effort and choice (Moody-Adams, 1997b: 256-265). The extreme fundamentalistIslamic terrorist sub-culture indicates that not all cultures provide the proper environments and facilities that enhance or allow the proper use of one's cognitive abilities. However, a morally ignorant agent may be able to reflect and see the wrongness of an action that derives from her wrong cultural principles and false beliefs, only if the following conditions among others exist:

(1) One has the opportunity within the culture to critically examine the truth of one's beliefs and the fundamental cultural principles that one accepts.

(2) One has alternative principles that one can accept in order to jettison old false ones that may induce moral ignorance, which makes one act badly.

These relevant conditions are absent for many terrorists who were brainwashed. Their oppressive conditions, false beliefs, and meta-beliefnegatively circumscribe the limits of their rational abilitiesand moral principles. Their false beliefs are "drilled" into them and they are prevented from critically reflecting on, questioning, or deviating from them. They cannot critically reflect on their beliefs beyond the scope of their faulty radical extremist beliefs. They do not have alternative beliefs, which they can use as the basis for critically reflecting on these beliefs. People have irrationally "internalized" the relevant religious-cultural principles and beliefs that act as cultural constraints on how they use their rational abilities in their choices and actions. This situation cannot be characterized as affected ignorance, which is more likely in cultures where the above two conditions exist, such that the culture is able to support and provide the necessary facilities for people to freely develop and use their abilities. If such facility exists and people decide not to utilize them to develop their abilities, then they have morally culpable affected ignorance. Some cultures do not give people sufficient latitude to reflectively utilize and adapt principles to practical situations. Such cultures, in Moody-Adams' view, cannot meaningfully be called a culture, and people in such situations cannot be considered rational moral agents in a meaningful robust sense (Moody-Adams, 1994: 307).

All cultures do not operateon liberal process and rational principles that people may consciously use to guide their conduct. Some cultures operate on people in irrational, unconscious, subconscious, and coercive ways to shape:

(1) the nature and scope of the reflection and evaluation that people engage in,

(2) the standards and processes by which people reflect and evaluate,

(3) the context of beliefs in which the reflection and evaluation are done, and

(4) how cultural standards may influence the outcome of one's reflection and evaluation.

Moody-Adams accepts that cultural principles are transmitted by people in a gradual subtle manner via various processes that people may not be conscious of; they are not transmitted instantly or automatically like viruses (Moody-Adams, 1994: 304). The various subtle ways of transmitting cultural norms vary with cultures, and the effects on people depend on the manner of transmission and the quality of the principles and

beliefs that are transmitted. Cultural processes vary in their ability to impair or enhance rational and reflective abilities. A plausible account of the connection between culture and moral agency involves the idea that culture and its principles shape choices or motivate actions in different rational, conscious, and non-rational, subconscious or unconscious ways.

Based on an abstract view of culture, Moody-Adams argues:

> Any culture that worked to impair these capacities would be creating the conditions for its own demise. (...) any humanly designed institution or system of rules that, as a matter of course, does impair these capacities cannot be called a culture at all. (Moody-Adams, 1994: 307)

Given the differences in the dynamics of culture, in that some are liberal while some are severely illiberal and oppressive, it is unreasonable for Moody-Adams touse an ideal abstract conception of culture to generalize about all cultures regarding their connection with human agency. Such view fails to recognize the specific dynamics of each culture, such as the oppressive extremist Islamic sub-culture of terrorism that brainwashes children. In analyzing culture, efforts must be made to appreciate the extent to which the processes of specific cultures allow people to acquire knowledge, engage in critical reflection, and bring critical reflection to bear on their actions, motives, and choices. Moody-Adams insists that "even the most brutal total institution may fail to eliminate altogether individual capacities for self-reflection and self-evaluation" (Moody-Adams, 1994: 304). Thus, oppressive cultural influences cannot induce the inability to act responsibly. Such influences may create some difficulty, which does not involve genuine non-culpable ignorance.

Moody-Adams (1994) appreciates that there are differences in cultural dynamics of cultures: some cultures are "brutal" (illiberally oppressive) while others are not, and there are varying degrees of brutality. She remarks that "there is a world of difference between a convent and a Nazi concentration camp" (1994: 305). The extreme fundamentalist Islamic terrorist subculture has a Nazi concentration camp "brutal" flavor. The differences in cultural dynamics have implications regarding whether a person can reasonably know relevant facts about the moral wrongness of her actions. In the absence of such knowledge, a person ought not to be blamed. Such recognition may provide a basis for forgiveness and external efforts to provide relevant knowledge. In my view, the plausibility of culturally induced moral ignorance depends on

whether a culture is oppressive and illiberal, and whether it has false beliefs, bad principles, indoctrinating and brainwashing processes of acculturationthat impede people's ability to engage in critical reflection, such that they cannot substantially revise or change their principles or beliefs, in order to jettison old bad ones and accept new good ones.

People are able to know the limits and scope of their abilities only in a situation where they can freely usethem. It is in the process and context of using one's abilities that one can know one's practical impediments and how to remove them. If the factors impeding one's abilities are the dogmatic principles and brainwashing processes of an illiberal oppressive culture, then the efforts to remove the impediments must be both internal and external. The external efforts may involve rational engagement and persuasion; only external efforts can lead to internal changes in the cultural principles and processes. It is usually difficult for internal changes to arise sui generis because the culture is illiberal, and the impediments are self-perpetuating as a result of thebrainwashing processes. The illiberal nature of the culture means that it is opposed to alternative views. Although there is usually no full-proof a priori method for determining whether a culture is illiberally oppressive, and whether its processes, false beliefs, and dogmatic principles are self-perpetuating to warrant external efforts, there are, however, empirical indicators.

Some of these indicators include the widespread moral ignorance and false beliefs. These indicators areprima facie reasons to think that the culture has impediments in terms of being oppressive, illiberal, and brainwashing. However, if knowledge is widespread in a society and some people do not make efforts to be informed, then we have a case of affected or culpable ignorance that does not vitiate responsibility. The problem in this situation is with the individual and not the culture! But if relevant knowledge is not widespread or not allowed in a culture, because it is illiberally oppressive and brainwashing, to the extent of limiting people's ability to know, then we have a case of genuineignorance that may vitiate responsibility. A good argument against the plausibility of culturally induced moral ignorance must show:

(1) conceptually, a lack of connection between culture and actions,

(2) empirically, that the relevant facts regarding wrong and right are readily available to a moral agent – not simply that he is capable of knowing, and

(3) that the ignorant person has voluntarily and intentionally refused to know the widely available facts.

## CONCLUSION

Illiberal oppressivecultures usually demand conformity with cultural norms by using various illiberal processes such as brainwashing, pressure or threat of violence. People succumb to such influence on a practically rational ground of social acceptance so that they can lead a peaceful life. Hence, if an oppressive culture creates widespread ignorance, then it is unreasonable to say that individuals in the situation refused to know what they ought to know, such that their ignorance is affected ignorance, and their bad actions are due to their own failing. Moody-Adams' view that the idea of genuine moral ignorance is implausible suggests that extremist Islamic terrorists are neither inherently evil to be considered social paths nor genuinely morally ignorant. They are ordinary responsible moral agents who simply do monstrous things. Their beliefs are just mistaken, their terrorist acts are evil, and they are capable of reflecting on their beliefs and actions, and making modifications. Their evil acts are indications of their moral failings and they simply refused to reflect on their beliefs and actions in order to desist from terrorism. She uses idea of the banality of evil to illustrate that ordinary people who are not monsters, insane, or morally ignorant, may sometimes make mistakes and do evil things (Moody-Adams, 1994: 298-299).

The ability to act out of characterdue to human failing is a necessary part of human nature. This implies that we should not find excuses for terrorists by appealing to religious extremism as a basis for moral ignorance. But this point ignores the effect of the dogmatic doctrines and extreme processes of brainwashing in the terrorist sub-cultures. Given the inhibiting environment, belief system, processes of oppressive extreme Islamic terrorist sub-cultures, and thus, moral ignorance, there may be an explanatory excuse, not a justification, for some terrorist acts. Perhaps, this excuse is as legitimate, morally, as the battered woman's syndrome is, legally.

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