

On being and holding responsible

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In his *Responsibility and the moral sentiments*, Wallace develops the idea that we should think of what it is to be morally responsible for an act in terms of norms for holding someone responsible for that act. Smith has recently claimed that Wallace's approach and those like it are 'fundamentally misguided'. She says that such approaches make the mistake of incorporating conditions for 'actively blaming' others into the basic conditions for being responsible, when in fact the conditions for active blame 'go beyond' the basic conditions. In this essay, I argue that Smith's otherwise illuminating discussion of these 'Normativist' approaches does not undermine them. Specifically, I maintain that being actively blamable by certain persons with the relevant standing is actually constitutive of being responsible for at least some acts. By distinguishing between persons with different sorts of standing, a Normativist approach can avoid Smith's challenge. My larger aim is thus to clarify and defend the Normativist approach.

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1. Introduction

You bump into a stranger on the sidewalk; you not only startle her, but upset her. Your friend of 20 years cannot make it to your wedding because she insists she must attend a business conference; you are resentful. Your son earned a low grade in English again, apparently because he did not do his homework; you are disappointed. Your mother graduates from college at age 50, which fills you with a sense of pride. The things people do affect us in various rich and complex ways. Indeed, our actions seem to be inextricably mixed up with the reactions they get.

Strawson's 'Freedom and resentment' was seminal in emphasizing this connection (Strawson 1962). That essay has sparked various novel and interesting reflections on a range of related topics (see, for instance, Watson 1975; Russell 1995; Fischer and Ravizza 1998; Vargas 2004; Sneddon 2005). At one level of abstraction, Strawson's essay suggests that we should think of what it is to be morally responsible for an action in terms of what it is to hold someone responsible for that action.¹ In *Responsibility and the moral sentiments*, Wallace (1994) develops this idea in one particular way. He aims to provide an account of what it is to be responsible for an action in terms of norms for holding someone responsible for that action. Following Wallace's own terminology, I call such accounts 'Normativist', since norms of appropriate *holding* are taken to be constitutive of *being* responsible.² In her recent essay 'On being responsible and holding

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responsible', Smith (2007, 466–7) argues that Normativist approaches like Wallace's are 'fundamentally misguided'. In particular, she says that Wallace makes the mistake of incorporating into his account conditions for 'actively blaming' others, but such conditions 'go beyond' the basic conditions for being responsible. Thus, she charges that any such account builds too much into what it is to be responsible.

In this essay, I shall argue that Smith's otherwise illuminating discussion of Normativist approaches does not undermine those approaches. Specifically, I argue that being actively blamable by persons with the relevant standing is actually constitutive of being responsible for at least some of our actions. By distinguishing between persons with different sorts of standing, a Normativist approach can avoid Smith's challenge. Indeed, that is precisely how Normativist approaches promise to be an avenue toward progress in thinking about what it is to be responsible for an action. They direct us toward the rich texture of life we live with others as a locus of our responsibility for our actions. In this respect, my larger aim is to clarify and defend the Normativist approach.

In the next part of the paper (section 2), I lay out Smith's objection to Normativism. In section 3, in light of that objection, I begin to clarify the core idea of a Normativist approach. And in section 4, I develop the response to Smith that I have just mentioned. In section 5, I close the essay by saying where things stand given my response to Smith.

2. Smith's objection to Normativism

A Normativist approach aims to articulate what it is to be responsible for an action or attitude in terms of norms for holding someone responsible for that action or attitude. More schematically: For B to be responsible for an action or attitude X is for it to be appropriate to hold B responsible for X.³ The basic strategy for such approaches is to articulate (a) what is involved in holding someone responsible and (b) what the norms are governing such 'holdings'.⁴ An over-arching constraint on Normativism is to give a substantive articulation of the conditions under which it is appropriate to hold responsible (the *analysans*). Otherwise, the account risks being trivial. For instance, an account that says that it is appropriate to hold B responsible for X when B is responsible for X would be true but completely uninformative. So, the *analysans* need to be substantive. For instance, one might say that it is appropriate to hold B responsible for X when B caused X intentionally. It is also important to notice at the outset that the aim of such an account is not to provide a reductive analysis of what it is to be responsible (the *analysandum*). In this way, such an account may exhibit circularity – the notion of responsibility appears in both the *analysans* and the *analysandum* – but this is not vicious circularity. When the *analysans* is given a substantive articulation, such accounts can be illuminating.

Smith aims to establish that Normativist approaches are 'fundamentally misguided' (Smith 2007, 466–7). Noticing that 'holding responsible' is the central notion for these approaches, her first step is to distinguish three ways of interpreting 'A holds B responsible for X':

- (1) A holds B to be responsible for X.
- (2) A holds B to be culpable for X.
- (3) A blames B for X.

For Smith, (1) corresponds to judging. (Or mere judging, as she will later say.) For A to judge that B is responsible for X is to believe that B is, in principle, open to moral appraisal for X. Such appraisal may be either 'positive' or 'negative'. For A to so judge B is not yet for A

to judge whether B's X-ing was good or bad, right or wrong. Here enters (2). For A to judge that B is culpable for X is to judge that B is open to moral criticism for X, and not just any moral assessment. Finally, (3) corresponds to 'active blaming' (Smith's expression). Whereas (1) and (2) primarily concern judging or believing, (3) concerns a stance that presupposes such believing and 'can include both blaming attitudes such as resentment and indignation as well as explicit acts of reproach or censure' (Smith 2007, 470).

Smith articulates some of the connections between these modes of holding responsible. If A is permitted to actively blame B for X, then A must also be permitted to judge B to be responsible for X. If mere judging is not permissible, then neither is active blaming. For instance, if it is acceptable for me to be upset with and say something to my son for not calling me on Father's Day, then it must also be acceptable for me to think that he is responsible for not calling me. Crucially, it is not the case that if A is permitted to judge B to be responsible for X, then A is also (thereby) permitted to actively blame B for X. It may be permissible for me to believe that my neighbor failed to attend his adolescent daughter's violin concert, but if I barely know him, it may not be permissible for me to say anything to him about it. Thus, Smith maintains that the conditions for appropriately actively blaming someone 'go beyond' conditions for 'merely judging' someone to be responsible and so go beyond what it is to be responsible. The set of conditions for appropriate judging can be satisfied, while the conditions for judging culpable and actively blaming are not satisfied.

That gives us some idea of what 'active blame' is, according to Smith. She goes on to explain that:

When we judge another person morally culpable for some action or attitude, we often feel emotions such as anger, resentment, or indignation toward her as a result. . . [W]e sometimes go on to express these emotions to the offending party, by explicitly reproaching her for her wrongdoing, by demanding an apology, or by sanctioning her in other ways (e.g., by shunning her or making her transgression known to others). These reactive attitudes and sanctioning activities are the responses I have in mind in referring to 'active blame'. (Smith 2007, 476–7)

Although active blame is sometimes outwardly expressed, Smith maintains that active blame need not be so expressed toward the object of that blame (Smith 2007, 477).

Smith goes on to provide a helpful discussion of three of the relevant conditions that determine whether active blaming is appropriate. First, one must have relevant standing. For active blame to be appropriate, A might need to be a close friend of B, and not a complete stranger or a mere neighbor. Second, the action or attitude (X) that is at issue must be significant enough to warrant address. Forgetting once to lock the door at night might be 'dismissed' if it occurs within a pattern of remembering to lock the door. Third, A's blaming B may be inappropriate if B has already expressed aloud that it was wrong of her to X and expressed commitment not to X in the future.

These various conditions for appropriate active blame concern not just the target of blame but other considerations, such as the standing of the one doing the blaming. But Smith objects that those conditions ought not to form part of what it is for the target of active blame to be responsible. That is, while these extra conditions may be central for understanding certain dimensions of our moral practices, they are not an essential part of what it is to be merely responsible for an action; they are not constitutive of being responsible for an action. Thus, Smith concludes that accounts that incorporate norms for active blaming into what it is to be responsible build in too much. She thinks incorporating such norms into an account is characteristic of a Normativist approach, and so that kind of approach is 'fundamentally misguided'.⁵ Since I shall be scrutinizing that point later, it

deserves emphasis here. According to Smith, a Normativist approach is ‘fundamentally misguided’ because it incorporates (norms of) active blaming into its account of what it is to be responsible, and active blaming is only something that certain people with the right standing can do and only in certain circumstances. In rough terms, being actively blamable is not part of the basic conditions of being responsible; being actively blamable involves facts or circumstances that go beyond the basic conditions of responsibility.

3. Clarifying the core Normativist idea

Ultimately, I want to show that for some acts, openness to active blame for them is constitutive of what it is to be responsible for them. As a first step, it is instructive to clarify the core Normativist idea.

Consider Smith’s argument. She is right that there are different senses or uses of the expression ‘A holds B responsible for X’.⁶ She is also right that if it is appropriate for one to actively blame,⁷ then it is appropriate for one to merely judge, but not vice versa. If actively blaming a person for an action is appropriate only with special conditions in place, it can seem that being responsible for that action is something short of or less than being appropriately actively blamable for it. You could be responsible for an action without it being appropriate for me to criticize you openly for it. Normativist accounts are trying to clarify what it is to be responsible for an action. If they incorporate the conditions of being appropriately actively blamable, they apparently incorporate too much – they incorporate conditions that do not seem to be necessary for simply being responsible for the action. So, any Normativist account should leave out such conditions.

But that is a much more limited conclusion than what Smith herself purports to establish, which is that any account that makes ‘attributions of responsibility dependent upon the appropriateness of our reactions as moral judges will turn out to be fundamentally misguided’. In her terms – temporarily granting her premises – she has only shown that accounts that make attributions of responsibility dependent upon the appropriateness of *active blaming* will turn out to be fundamentally flawed. That might be true, but it nevertheless leaves open the possibility that one could offer a good account of what it is to be responsible in terms of norms for ‘judging’ or ‘holding culpable’ or some other sort of reaction as moral judge. There could be credible versions of Normativism that make ‘attributions of responsibility dependent upon the appropriateness of our reactions as moral judges’, but do not include the conditions of appropriate active blaming.

Is that right? In general, what kinds of ‘holding’ can a Normativist appeal to in developing her approach? Let us try to clarify what Normativism apparently aspires to do. Smith notes that ‘holding responsible’ is an inappropriate choice of words. In addition to being ambiguous in the way we have already acknowledged, Smith also notices that talk of ‘holding responsible’ typically has a negative (or blaming or criticizing) connotation, as when a father says to his young daughter, ‘I’m holding you responsible for the broken vase’, in the context of an unreasonable amount of rambunctious behavior among the daughter and her friends. We do not typically use that form of expression with a positive (or praising or approving) connotation. For instance, it would be awkward to say, ‘I’m holding you responsible for making that lovely, thoughtful and delicious dinner’. Given that ‘holding’ has this negative connotation, if Normativism is stated in these terms, then any version of it will be focused particularly on our negative (or critical or blaming) actions and attitudes. But one might think that it is plausible that being responsible for an action or attitude can involve something other than being appropriately criticizable or judged culpable for an action or being the target of any number of other ‘negative’

responses; instead, it might involve being appropriately praisable, and it plausibly involves a much wider range of ‘positive’ attitudes.⁸ At the very least, this possibility should not be foreclosed by the very language in which the Normativist idea is couched. So, a more neutral formulation of the Normativist idea seems to be in order, one that makes clear that it need not be focused solely on norms for negative (critical, blaming or punitive) reactive attitudes, but can also include positive responses.

We can help ourselves somewhat if we think of Normativism as proposing that a person’s being responsible for an act should be understood in terms of norms for *taking* or *treating* the person as responsible for that act. ‘Taking to be responsible’ or ‘treating as responsible’ or again ‘regarding as responsible’ may be more cumbersome and less evocative than ‘holding responsible’, but they have the virtue of lacking obviously negative connotations.⁹ Like ‘holding’, these expressions have the virtue of leaving open what can count as ‘taking’, ‘treating’ or ‘regarding’; it can include thoughts, emotions, moods, actions and utterances of various sorts.¹⁰

With this clarification in place, it may seem that the core idea of Normativism – to articulate *being responsible* in terms of *norms of taking to be responsible* – can be executed in various ways because there are various ways of ‘treating someone as responsible’. Emphasizing norms of one sort, like those of active blaming, may be but one way of doing this. Perhaps a good Normativist account could rest content to focus on the norms for *judging* or *believing* a person to be responsible for an act.

But that ultimately will not work. If a Normativist approach restricts itself to mere judging or even judging culpability, it diminishes itself to triviality, as Smith herself points out (Smith 2007, 472). Suppose that ‘merely judging’ B to be responsible for X is roughly just believing that B is responsible for X. Then the view is that for B to be responsible for X is for it to be appropriate/correct (in some sense) to believe that B is responsible for X. But that is not an illuminating thing to say; it does not help us understand what it is to be responsible for X; for we should still want to know when it is appropriate to believe that someone is responsible for X. And the obvious answer here is: when she is in fact responsible for X! Such an articulation of the Normativist approach makes it trivially true.

Lance and White (2007) make this general point in distinguishing ‘stance’ approaches from ‘metaphysical’ approaches to questions. A metaphysical approach aims to say directly what X is, while a stance approach asks first what it is to take something to be an X. So, what we are here calling a ‘Normativist’ approach is a version of their stance approach. They write:

Stance approaches are interesting only if what it is to take something to be (say) a person is not simply a matter of having beliefs or uttering assertions about it. For example, suppose that one took a stance approach to accounting for personhood, and claimed that taking something to be a person was believing them to be a member of the species *homo sapiens*. The stance approach, in this instance, is a needless complication: the same account could have been put more simply in the metaphysical mode, by saying that a person is a member of the species *homo sapiens*. Consequently, interesting stance accounts will employ attitudes other than belief or things other than attitudes, such as actions, practices, or institutional arrangements. For example, an interesting stance account of personhood might say that taking something to be a person is a matter of holding them responsible for what they do, where this is given a richer characterization than merely believing them to be responsible for what they do. (Lance and White 2007, 2)

If Lance and White are right, then a satisfactory Normativist approach is compelled to articulate what is involved in taking someone to be responsible in terms that go beyond believing or thinking that she is responsible.

Wallace himself addresses related methodological issues in his ‘Methodological Interlude’ in *Responsibility*. His comments deserve discussion here since his terms are similar to but not the same as those of Lance and White. Wallace situates his own approach in contrast to both a ‘metaphysical’ approach and an ‘extreme pragmatist’ approach (Wallace 1994, 85). According to him, a metaphysical approach ‘postulate[s] facts about responsibility that are completely prior to and independent of our practice of holding people responsible’ (Wallace 1994, 85). An extreme pragmatist approach ‘abandon[s] the idea that there is any fact of the matter about what it is to be responsible’ (Wallace 1994, 85).¹¹ Wallace’s conception of a ‘metaphysical’ approach lines up reasonably well with Lance and White’s conception of a ‘metaphysical’ approach. But it might seem that Wallace himself would oppose a ‘stance’ approach because it looks like an ‘extreme pragmatist’ approach. Crucially, however, Lance and White emphasize that a stance approach need not be ‘irrealist’ (their word) in the way that ‘extreme pragmatism’ threatens to be. They write,

Appropriateness is the tool used to convert from the stance mode to the metaphysical mode. Thus, suppose our stance account says that taking something to be a person is to hold them responsible. The corresponding answer to the metaphysical question (What is a person?) is that a person is something that it is appropriate to hold responsible. (Lance and White 2007, 2–3)

Thus, a stance approach need not be irrealist, especially where it appeals to ‘appropriateness’ or norms. And so Wallace need not oppose a stance approach, so long as it incorporates norms. Indeed, given Lance and White’s way of thinking of stance approaches, Wallace’s approach can be thought of as a normative stance approach.¹²

Now, if we combine Lance and White’s point (about what a stance approach must say in order to be interesting) with Smith’s claim that conditions for actively blaming a person go beyond the basic conditions for being responsible, it appears Normativists face a challenge. They must develop a genuinely substantive picture of what it is to be responsible, that does not incorporate too much into the basic conditions of being responsible.

So, the question at this point is this: Is Smith right that the conditions of actively blaming a person for an act go beyond the basic conditions of responsibility for the act? I shall argue in the next section that she is not right. Norms for actively blaming a person for an act are constitutive of what it is to be responsible for that act.

4. Are norms for active blame part of what constitutes being responsible for some acts?

Now, I want to challenge Smith’s claim that ‘the conditions under which it would be fair or appropriate to blame a person go beyond the basic conditions of responsibility and culpability’. More positively, I will be arguing that norms for actively blaming someone for an action are part of what constitutes being responsible for some actions.¹³ (In brief, I will be contending that norms that *regulate* actively blaming B for X can also be *constitutive* of B’s responsibility for X. One simple analogy captures the intuitive idea: norms that regulate how a rook can and cannot be moved also partly constitute what it is for something to be a rook.) Consequently, I will argue that norms for active blaming need not be excluded from a proper Normativist approach.

Consider an analogy to start. What is it to treat someone as a runner in baseball? There are a lot of dimensions to so treating someone. If you are on the opposing team, the runner is a person you can and should tag, if the chance arises (if you are in the game). If you are the base coach on the runner’s team, the runner is a person you should be communicating with.

If you are at bat, he is someone you should be trying to advance. If you are an umpire, he is someone that you can and might need to call ‘out’. All of these perspectives or *takes* on the runner include not only a ‘cognitive’ or ‘epistemic’ dimension, but also have a crucial ‘practical’ dimension: one must be prepared or disposed to *act* in various ways.

These are some ways in which a runner gets treated. But I have not described merely how a runner gets treated. I have characterized various ways in which different groups are *allowed* to and *should* treat a runner; I have given expression to *rules* that regulate conduct toward a runner. In Searle’s (1970, 33) well-known terminology, they are *regulative* rules. Following Searle, we can notice that some regulative rules are also *constitutive* rules.¹⁴ Such rules do not merely regulate a form of conduct, they also help constitute something as the thing it is. One way to express this difference between types of rules is to say that something that violates a merely regulative rule for runners – say, staying in the base path – can still be a runner; whereas something that violates a constitutive rule for being a runner cannot even count as a runner – someone who is not on one of the teams cannot be a runner.

Without argument, I am going to claim that it is plausible that some, if not all, of the rules I have just mentioned partly constitute what it is to be a runner – a person would not be a runner if she did not satisfy these rules. For example, if you are simply not someone that the opposing team can and should tag, then you are not a runner.

To further our discussion of Smith, notice now that there are *different* rules for how *different* groups may or should treat a runner. For example, opponents on the field and in the game can tag a runner; umpires are allowed to call the runner ‘out’, but are not allowed to tag him, etc. Only certain people can treat the runner in certain ways. For instance, not just anyone can (or is permitted to) tag the runner. Specifically, fans are not permitted to tag a runner, nor are the runner’s teammates, nor are the umpires. These people do not have the requisite standing. So, not everyone is allowed to tag the runner. The crucial point here is that it is nevertheless true that being tagable by the right people is constitutive of being a runner. As I said a moment ago, if you are not someone that the opposing team can and should tag, then you are simply not a runner.

Thus, this case suggests that the propriety of a certain kind of treatment can be constitutive of having a certain status even though that form of treatment is appropriate only for a restricted range of people. This suggests that a refinement of the schematic statement of Normativism is in order. Originally (at the beginning of section 2) I said the basic Normativist idea was this: For B to be responsible for an action X is for it to be appropriate to hold B responsible for X. We see now that it should read: For B to be responsible for an action X is for it to be appropriate for people with the right standing to hold B responsible for X in the right circumstances. In this formulation, we explicitly acknowledge a place for the persons doing the holding and for the circumstances of such holdings. This refinement, however, does not yet remove Smith’s worry for we are not yet clear on the place of active blaming in the account of what it is to be responsible.

Is openness to active blame constitutive of being responsible for some acts? The case of the runner suggests (by analogy) that it is. But maybe that example is not representative. A similar point can be made for domains that are not as explicitly and rigidly rule-structured as baseball.¹⁵ Consider, for instance, the rules (or norms) for treating someone as a student.

Focus on the position of the teacher relative to the student. For a teacher to treat her student as a student goes beyond the teacher’s ‘judging’ that the student is her student. What more is involved? The teacher–student relationship continues to evolve and is contested, but we can put this interesting feature aside for present purposes. I will list some

things that are relatively standard in American schools; for each we can assume an implicit 'ceteris paribus' clause.¹⁶ When you treat someone as your student you:

- grade her assignments;
- respond to her comments and questions about the course material;
- ask her questions about the content of the course;
- correct her mistakes about the same;
- encourage her;
- show interest in the subject in her presence.

These are just some of the (more or less) standard ways in which teachers are permitted and required to engage people who are their students.

Here again we can deploy Searle's distinction between types of rules. These rules do not merely regulate the conduct of teachers toward students, but are also part of what constitute being a student. That is to say, for S to be a student is for it to be appropriate for S's teacher to treat S in (at least some of) these ways. If a teacher is not permitted to treat S in at least some of these ways, then S is simply not a student (of that teacher); the rules governing S's relationship with the teacher is part of what makes S a student.¹⁷ Consider grading, which is typically something only the teacher is permitted to do to the student. Being gradable by the teacher is part of what constitutes being a student. To be a student, then, is to be one who can be graded on certain performances by the teacher and only by the teacher. If S's putative teacher is not permitted to grade S's work, then S is (arguably) not her student at all. (By contrast, although a friend or parent may also have a license or even a responsibility to encourage S as a student, it only derives from a license or responsibility to promote those projects that S has reasonably taken on. If an acquaintance cannot treat S in the ways that a teacher can, it does not follow that S is not a student.)

We can see, then, that the appropriateness of certain kinds of treatment (such as grading) toward someone who is a student can be conditional on having the standing of teacher. Yet it is nevertheless also true that the appropriateness of those kinds of treatment is partly constitutive of being a student. Put simply: the propriety of certain kinds of treatment (grading) by certain kinds of people (teachers) partly constitutes the role of a student. This is precisely the analog of the point that we made in the case of the runner. You are allowed to tag a runner only if you are on the other team and in the game, but being tagable is nonetheless partly constitutive of being a runner. The general point is that the propriety of a certain kind of treatment can constitute the having of a certain status, standing, position or role, even though that form of treatment is appropriate only for a restricted range of people.

This fact tells against Smith. Her position was that a Normativist approach is 'fundamentally misguided' because it incorporates (norms of) active blaming into its account of what it is to be responsible, and active blaming is only something that certain people with the right standing can do and only in certain circumstances. Roughly, according to Smith, being actively blamable is not part of the basic conditions of being responsible; to be actively blamable involves facts or circumstances that go beyond the basic conditions of responsibility. In Searle's terminology: norms for actively blaming are merely regulative of being responsible for an act or attitude; they are not constitutive of it. But that should now seem less plausible, given our analogous cases. The propriety of certain forms of treatment (tagging, grading) can be conditional on the standing of the one issuing the treatment (and on the collateral circumstances), but these forms of treatment are nevertheless constitutive of having a certain status (as a runner, or as a student). For you to be a runner is for it to be appropriate for opponents on the field to tag you; for you to be a student is for it to be appropriate for your teacher to

grade your work. Thus, it appears that norms for forms of treatment that are arguably analogous to ‘active blaming’ – tagging and grading – are plausibly constitutive of having a certain status – being a runner and being a student, respectively.

The runner and student cases suggest by *analogy* that norms for active blaming may indeed be partly constitutive of what it is to be responsible for an act. But these analogies may seem weak. In particular, one might think that being a runner or being a student is not relevantly similar to being an agent. Thus, let me now approach the point more directly.¹⁸ If it turns out to be correct, Smith is wrong that Normativist approaches are ‘fundamentally misguided’.

Take one of Smith’s cases. She writes,

It may be inappropriate for me to express moral criticism to a stranger I meet at a party, who manifests demeaning and dismissive attitudes toward his wife (say, by repeatedly interrupting her and ignoring or ridiculing her contributions to the conversation).¹⁹ Since I do not know this person, or his wife, an explicit reproach on my part would be presumptuous and meddling, even if critical attitudes toward him are perfectly warranted. If I am not a stranger, but close friends with one or both of these people, by contrast, I may have legitimate standing to express criticism in such a case. Whether I should actually do so or not will then depend upon other factors, such as whether I think such criticism would do any good, and whether I think it would be appreciated or resented by the wife. (Smith 2007, 478)

Smith is right that she herself lacks the standing to say anything to the man in this particular situation if he is a stranger. She is also right that she might have legitimate standing to say something to the man if she is a close friend of either the man or the woman. And she is right a third time, when several lines later she writes, ‘The wife in the case just described. . . is in a position to take up certain special blaming attitudes toward her husband which a stranger and even a close friend are not’ (Smith 2007, 479). In this case, various responses are available to and appropriate for different people. Not all responses are appropriate for every person. Specifically, only some people (the wife, and perhaps close friends in the right circumstances) can actively blame the husband.

But from these facts it simply does not follow that the propriety of actively blaming the man is not constitutive of the man’s being responsible for having repeatedly interrupted his wife, and ignoring or ridiculing her contributions to the conversation.²⁰ In fact, it is much more plausible that the man’s responsibility for this specific sort of behavior is in part constituted by its now being permissible that his wife is allowed to feel and express disappointment or a feeling of betrayal. To help see that point, suppose that the man is indeed responsible for what he has done. What does this responsibility consist in? Among other things, it seems that his wife in particular should be allowed to feel and express disappointment or a feeling of betrayal. The man’s behavior is the sort that permits blame from certain people as a direct consequence. Conversely, if the wife was not allowed (even in principle) to actively blame the husband for this piece of conduct, then it becomes dubious that he is responsible for that piece of conduct. That other people who lack legitimate standing cannot respond in the way that the wife can does not speak against that point. If that is all sound, then we can answer the question with which we ended section 3: Is Smith right that the conditions of actively blaming a person for an act go beyond the basic conditions of responsibility for the act? The answer is ‘No’. Smith is mistaken. Norms for active blaming partly constitute what it is to be responsible for some acts, e.g. unreasonably mistreating your spouse, friend or companion in public.

If that last step is right, it should now also seem plausible that norms for active blaming *can* play a role in a proper Normativist account of what it is to be responsible for an act.

The abusive husband case shows that this is plausible. The husband's responsibility for mistreating his wife consists partly in his being the appropriate target of active blame by his wife for having mistreated her. This does not imply that active blame will be an appropriate response for people other than the wife. More generally, it does not imply that active blame will be an appropriate response to just any action (regardless of standing and circumstances); some actions simply are not of a sort that warrants blame of any sort (active or otherwise), such as placing a book back on a shelf or putting your right sock on first. The point is that responsibility for at least *some* actions is partly constituted by the active blame to which it entitles certain parties.

5. Conclusion

Where do things now stand?

Smith maintains that Normativist approaches are fundamentally misguided because they incorporate norms for active blame into the 'basic conditions of responsibility', but according to her the conditions under which it is appropriate to actively blame someone for an action somehow 'go beyond' the conditions of simply being responsible for an action. Intuitively, her claim is that being responsible for an action is one thing and being actively blamable for that action requires more. As I have tried to make clear throughout this essay, there are several things that are right about Smith's claim. She is right that you can be responsible for leaving the door of your house unlocked, even though it is not appropriate for me to actively blame you. This is a basic and important point: being responsible for X and being actively blamable for X are not the same thing; they can come apart. First, one typically needs relevant standing. I might need to be a close friend of yours, and not a complete stranger or a mere neighbor. Second, the action or attitude that is at issue – in this case, locking the door – must be significant enough to warrant address. As we considered earlier, forgetting once to lock the door might be dismissed if it occurs within a broader pattern of remembering to lock the door. Third, my actively blaming you might be inappropriate if you have already expressed aloud (or otherwise made apparent) that it was wrong to leave the door unlocked and expressed commitment not to do it again in the future.

I take this to show that not just anyone is in a position to actively blame you for something you do. Smith has not shown, however, that openness to active blame is not part of the basic condition of responsibility for all acts. She has shown only that such active blaming is typically restricted to certain persons in certain circumstances. Indeed, with the case of the abusive husband, Smith makes it plausible that part of the husband's responsibility for what he has done consists precisely in making it appropriate for his wife to feel disappointed or angry and to be prepared to rebuke him.

By addressing Smith's objection to Normativism we learn two general things about that kind of approach. First, a proper schematic characterization of it should acknowledge a place for those who are doing the holding and the circumstances in which such holding is done. Schematically: for B to be responsible for an action X is for it to be appropriate for people with the right standing to treat B as responsible for X in the right circumstances. The main aim of a Normativist approach then will be to provide substantive characterizations of the standing, treatment, and circumstances relevant to being responsible for different types of actions. Second, in addressing Smith's objection we see that openness to active blame can be constitutive of being responsible for some acts. This begins to make good on Normativism's promise to reveal substantive connections between being responsible and

norms for treating one another as responsible. Normativism is a fruitful approach that merits further development.

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Notes

1. Although this kind of approach to the issue of moral responsibility might derive proximally from Strawson's essay, it has clear precursors in the work of Fichte and Hegel. For recent discussions making these connections, see Darwall (2006), Kukla and Lance (2008), and Pippin (2009). The Normativist approach also bears some resemblance to the approaches of Dennett (1984) and Bok (1998), both of which emphasize differences in 'stances' or 'standpoints' for understanding what it is to be 'free' or morally responsible. McKenna (2004) suggests this connection.
2. Wallace himself says his type of account 'reflects a conviction that the question of what it is to be a morally responsible agent should be given what I call a *normative* interpretation' (1994, 1).
3. I am following Smith in using 'B' and 'X'. I am also following Smith in talking of actions or attitudes.
4. Wallace himself first articulates this two-part structure on p. 1. It then functions as the guiding structure of the whole book.
5. Smith targets Korsgaard (1996), as well as Wallace (1994).
6. Macnamara (forthcoming) discusses carefully what is needed for a proper understanding of 'holding' someone responsible.
7. I am treating 'actively blame' and 'merely judge' as complex verbs, which hopefully excuses the appearance of the split infinitives.
8. Wallace, for his part, is clear that 'positive' responses have a place in the story. Their place derives, however, from the negative responses. See, for instance, p. 61. It is an interesting question whether the positive responses have derivative or secondary importance. I am inclined to think they do not, but will not take up that argument here.
9. Watson (1975), for instance, suggests this way of talking.
10. This formulation lets us bear in mind the power of Strawson's essay. We can think of that essay as making two bold suggestions. First, the essay suggests that we should think of what it is to be responsible in terms of the recognition of others. Second, there are rich emotional or attitudinal dimensions to such recognition; it is not merely a matter of idly and inertly entertaining a thought about someone. (Strawson himself ultimately emphasizes certain attitudes and not others. But that does not detract from the point that much of the power of the essay is in the two suggestions I identify.)
11. Wallace expresses his alternative 'normative' approach in this 'schema': *S* is morally responsible (for an action *x*) if and only if it would be appropriate to hold *S* morally responsible (for *x*) (Wallace 1994).
12. For a discussion of methodology on this topic that focuses instead on the contrast between individualism and anti-individualism, see Sneddon (2005).
13. I say 'part of what constitutes', not 'wholly constitutes' because I am not making a sufficiency claim. Sometimes I will say '...partly constitute...' or '...partly constitutive of...'
14. For further helpful discussions of constitutive rules see Haugeland (1998) and Schapiro (2003).
15. Consider legal responsibility. Only certain officials are in a position to charge any citizen with a crime, or to bring them before a judge and jury. But the fact that such actions are permissible only for certain officials does not imply that being legally responsible for an act is not partly constituted by the permissibility of those acts. Like baseball, however, legal responsibility is governed by explicitly stated rules and so might be equally questionable as an analogy. Thanks to an anonymous referee for the suggestion.
16. I am thinking primarily of teachers as teachers in schools. Clearly, there are teachers outside of such settings and not everything I say extends to them.

17. Just as being a runner is constituted in part by rules that govern the conduct of certain other participants in the game of baseball toward the runner, so being a student is in part constituted by norms that govern the conduct of teachers (and other participants in the various institutions of education) toward the student.
18. One might think that being a runner and being a student are statuses defined in terms of relations to others, while being an agent concerns only 'intrinsic' or 'non-relational' features of individuals. Thanks to an anonymous referee of this journal for this way of putting the point.
19. Think here of the younger couple in Edward Albee's *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Even though the older husband and wife (played by Richard Burton and Liz Taylor in the film version) are relentlessly brutal to one another, the younger man and woman do not think they are in a position to intervene to stop it.
20. In Searle's terminology: it does not follow that these are merely regulative rules. Showing that a rule is regulative is not sufficient to show that it is not constitutive, since rules can be both regulative and constitutive; and showing that a rule is relativized to a restricted range of people is not sufficient to show that it is not constitutive.

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