

A Comprehensive Account of Blame

Self-Blame, Non-Moral Blame, and Blame for the Non-Agential

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Blame is multifarious. It can be passionate or dispassionate. It can be expressed or kept private. We blame both the living and the dead. And we blame ourselves as well as others. What's more, we blame ourselves, not only for our moral failings, but also for our non-moral failings: for our aesthetic bad taste, gustatory self-indulgence, or poor athletic performance. And we blame ourselves both for things over which we exerted agential control (e.g., our voluntary acts) and for things over which we lacked such control (e.g., our desires, beliefs, and intentions).

Unfortunately, though, many extant accounts of blame fail to do justice to the manifest diversity in our blaming practices. For instance, T. M. Scanlon holds that "to blame a person is...to take your relationship with him or her to be modified" (2008, 128–9) and, as a consequence, "to alter or withhold intentions and expectations that that relationship would normally involve" (2013, 89). Yet, it seems clear that we can blame the dead without either taking our relationship with them to have been modified or altering our intentions with respect to them. Others—e.g., Miranda Fricker (2016)—acknowledge blame's manifest diversity but hold that, given this diversity, we must give up on the prospect of providing necessary and sufficient conditions for blame. These philosophers hold that just as there's nothing common to all instances of the word 'game', there's nothing common to all instances of the word 'blame'. They believe that the best that we can hope for is an account that specifies the extension of 'blame' either in terms of sufficient resemblance to some paradigm or in terms of what Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) called *family resemblances*. Still others—e.g., Angela Smith (2013)—think that although the diversity in our blaming practices shouldn't lead us to give up on the prospect of

providing necessary and sufficient conditions, we should give up on the prospect of specifying those conditions in terms of what's *constitutive* of blame. For, as these functionalists see things, the only thing that unites all instances of blame is that they all play the same functional role.¹

In contrast to all these philosophers, I'm more optimistic about the possibility of providing a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that specifies blame's extension in terms of its constitution as opposed to its function. Indeed, in what follows, I'll offer a constitutive analysis of blame that accounts for blame in all its disparate forms. And I'll argue that this proposal has several advantages. For one, it can account for the fact that one's having had control over whether one was to φ is a necessary condition for one's being fittingly blamed for having φ -ed. For another, it can account for why, unlike fitting shame, fitting blame is always deserved, which in turn explains why there is something morally problematic about ridding oneself of one's fitting self-blame (e.g., one's fitting guilt). Lastly, I'll show that my proposal is compatible both with the possibility that a subject lacks the standing to express her fitting blame and with the possibility that a subject ought to forgive someone whom it would be fitting for her to blame. Thus, I'll be defending what I take to be a promising, comprehensive account of blame.

1. My Proposal for a Comprehensive Account of Blame

To be blamed for something is to be held responsible for it. But there are at least two ways of being responsible for something. One is to be the cause of it. This is *causal responsibility*. Another

¹ Functionalists hold that blame is, in a certain respect, more like a mousetrap than a diamond (Polger 2019). What makes something a mousetrap is not that it's constituted in a certain way but that it has a certain function: that of trapping a mouse. By contrast, what makes something a diamond is not that it has a certain function but that it is constituted by carbon crystals with a certain molecular lattice structure. On functionalist accounts, then, blame is just whatever has some particular function, and not what's constituted by certain mental states. But, like Dana Kay Nelkin (2017, 816), I doubt that our concept of blame is at bottom a functionalist one. It seems to me that some instances of blame have absolutely no function. Consider, for instance, someone who privately blames herself for some long-past misdeed only to die seconds later. I doubt that such instances of blame have any function, even an unfulfilled one. For it seems a category mistake to think that such instances of blame are idle in the way that a mousetrap in a world with no mice would be.

is to be accountable for it. And if one is accountable for something, then one can be appropriately held liable to reward or sanction for it. The reward or sanction needn't come from the law, society, or common opinion, but it must at least come from the approval or disapproval of one's own conscience—see Mill 1991, chap. 5. And, to distinguish this from causal responsibility, I'll call it *normative responsibility*.² And it's important to distinguish these two, because one can be causally responsible for something without being normatively responsible for it. I can, for instance, be causally responsible for spreading a virus at work even if I'm not normatively responsible for doing so given that I wasn't yet exhibiting any symptoms and had no idea that I was even infected.

My aim in this paper is to provide an account of *normative blame* as opposed to *causal blame*, where to be normatively blamed for something is to be held normatively responsible for it such that one can be appropriately held to account for it.³ In the remainder, though, I'll typically leave the 'normative' qualifier implicit. In any case, my proposed account of (normative) blame is as follows.

My Proposal: For any subject S, any potential target T (where T may or may not be identical to S), and any φ , S blames T for having supposedly φ -ed if and only if both of the following conditions are met: (Condition 1) it seems to S as if (a) T has φ -ed, (b) T has violated a legitimate demand in φ -ing, and (c) T deserves to suffer the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse in virtue of having violated this legitimate demand and

² The type of responsibility that contrasts with causal responsibility is more often called *moral responsibility*, but given that we can (or so I'll argue) have this sort of responsibility with respect to violations of non-moral demands, the 'moral' qualifier can be quite misleading. For this reason, I've chosen to borrow Rik Peels more apt phrase *normative responsibility* (2017, 16). For someone who shares my worry about the more common phrase but adopts it anyway, see Hilary Bok (1998, 123n.1). Also, as I see it, the relevant sort of responsibility is the one that's conceptually tied to the desert of reward or sanction, where the sense of desert at issue is "basic" in that the justification for rewarding or sanctioning the given subject for having φ -ed is simply that she deserves this reward or sanction in virtue of her having φ -ed and not in virtue of any more fundamental normative consideration—e.g., some consequentialist or contractualist consideration (Pereboom 2014, 2).

³ Blaming a person for φ -ing is just one way of holding her to account for φ -ing. Another way is to punish her for φ -ing.

(Condition 2) S feels, as a result of these seemings, disapproval of, or disappointment in, T for having supposedly φ -ed.⁴

This proposal is meant to be an account of what it is, in fact, to blame someone for having φ -ed. So, it isn't meant to be revisionary. That is, I'm not trying to figure out what blame would need to be for our blaming practices to be justified. Indeed, I'm interested in the correct account of blame partly because I'm interested in whether our blaming practices would be justified even if all our actions are causally determined. And depending on what the correct account of blame is, it will be more or less plausible to think that people can be blameworthy for acts that they were causally determined to perform. For if, on the one hand, blaming people merely entails evaluating them, then, given that evaluations can be accurate—and, thus, appropriate—regardless of whether the people being evaluated had control over the properties in virtue of which these evaluations are accurate, there would be nothing problematic about blaming people for actions that they were causally determined to perform. But if, on the other hand, blaming people entails deliberately causing them to suffer, then, given that no one deserves to suffer in virtue of things over which they lacked control, it would be problematic to blame people for acts that they were causally determined to perform—at least, it would be assuming that causal determinism rules out the sort of control that's required for being deserving of suffering.

Fortunately, on my proposal, blame lies somewhere between these two extremes, such that blame goes beyond mere evaluative judgment but falls well short of necessitating the

⁴ Although I won't discuss the positive analogue of blame in detail here, it's an advantage of my account of blame that it suggests the following symmetrical account: For any subject S, any potential target T (where T may or may not be identical to S), and any φ , S feels gratitude—or whatever the positive analogue of blame is—toward T for having supposedly φ -ed if and only if both of the following conditions are met: (Condition 1) it seems to S as if (a) T has φ -ed, (b) T has done what she ought to have done in φ -ing, and (c) T deserves to experience the pleasantness of pride or joy in virtue of having done what she ought to have done and (Condition 2) S feels, as a result of these seemings, approval of T for having supposedly φ -ed. Also, I should note that the phrase 'as a result' should not be seen as referring to a causal relation that could potentially be deviant, but rather to a rationalization relation that couldn't.

deliberate infliction of suffering.⁵ On my proposal, blame must go beyond mere evaluative judgment in that it necessitates feeling disapproval of, or disappointment in, its target. Thus, it requires a change in one's attitudes toward the target. And, so, there is, on my proposal, a distinction between blaming a person and merely making some set of judgments about her. For merely making some set of judgments about a person and her conduct (such as that she was wrong to have ϕ -ed or that she was morally responsible for having ϕ -ed) falls well short of holding her accountable for that conduct.⁶

But my proposal stops well short of insisting that blame must involve the deliberate infliction of suffering. Since my proposal denies that blame requires taking any action, and since the deliberate infliction of suffering necessitates action, my proposal allows that one can blame someone without deliberately inflicting suffering. Indeed, on my proposal, blame essentially involves only two things: (1) a set of seemings/representations and (2) a feeling of disapproval or disappointment. These are mental states, not actions. Thus, my account allows that blame can be unexpressed and uncommunicated in that it holds that blame need only involve possessing these mental states and need not involve the act of expressing or communicating them.

And since a seeming (that is, a representation) is not a belief, my proposal allows that a subject can blame a person while believing that she isn't blameworthy. That is, my account allows for what's known as *recalcitrant blame* (D'Arms & Jacobson 2003), where a subject can't seem to help but blame a person despite judging that she isn't blameworthy.⁷ Such recalcitrant

⁵ Most agree with me in thinking that the correct account of blame must lie somewhere between these two extremes. See, for instance, Coates & Tognazzini (2013), Darwall (2010), Scanlon (2008; 2013), Sher (2006), and Smith (2013).

⁶ Thus, I concur with David Shoemaker in thinking that "blame involves attitude adjustment (and not mere deployment of judgments)" (2013, 101).

⁷ More generally, a recalcitrant attitude is one that stubbornly persists even in the face of a subject's conscious reflection on the facts or evidence that have led her to believe that its representations are inaccurate. Besides D'Arms & Jacobson, proponents of the possibility of recalcitrant blame—or, at least, recalcitrant guilt, indignation, or resentment—include Brady (2009), Carlsson (forthcoming), Gibbard (1990), McKenna (2012, 67), Menges (2017, 261), Pickard (2013), and Wallace (1994). Examples of recalcitrant blame (and, specifically, recalcitrant resentment) include the time that my wife admitted feeling resentful of me because she had just woken up from a vivid dream in which it seemed to her as if I had just cheated on her. Nevertheless, having woken up and realized that I had been sleeping beside her all night, she knew that I hadn't and that, therefore, her resentment was inappropriate. Another example is when I felt resentful of my wife for leaving me home alone with our baby as she had a fun night out with her friends,

blame is analogous to recalcitrant fear, where, for instance, a subject can't seem to help but fear something (say, flying) despite judging that it poses no significant danger to her. This is possible, because just as the fear of flying necessitates merely representing flying as dangerous (and, thus, not necessarily believing that it's dangerous), blaming a person necessitates merely representing her as someone who deserves the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse (and, thus, not necessarily believing that she deserves this). And to represent p as being the case is merely for it to seem to one that p is the case. So, just as the two lines in a Müller-Lyer illusion can seem as if they're unequal in length even if one believes that they're of equal length, it can seem to one as if p even if one believes that it's not the case that p .

Now, for a subject to represent some target T as deserving of X is for it to seem to her that, as a matter of justice and in virtue of T 's possessed characteristics or prior activities, T merits X in the sense that entails that the world in which T gets X and merits X in this sense is, other things being equal, non-instrumentally better than the world in which she gets X but doesn't merit X in this sense (cf. Feinberg 1970, 58). Note, then, that the relevant sense of 'merit' is not the one in which, say, Southwest Airlines merits a five-star customer-approval rating given its exceptional customer satisfaction. For even if Southwest Airlines does, in some sense, merit a five-star rating, it's not in the sense that entails that the world in which Southwest Airlines gets a five-star rating and merits such a rating in this sense is, other things being equal, non-instrumentally better than the world in which Southwest Airlines gets a five-star rating but doesn't merit such a rating in this sense. For if it's at all good that Southwest Airlines gets a five-star rating, it's only *instrumentally* good in that it helps customers find an airline with which they'll be satisfied. After all, there is nothing inherently good about Southwest Airlines getting a customer-approval rating that accurately reflects its degree of customer satisfaction. By contrast, there is something inherently good about someone's getting what she deserves.

because, as it turned out, our baby was unusually cranky and difficult that night. I felt this way despite believing that she hadn't done anything wrong given that this was what we had agreed would be her night to go out. Note, then, that I disagree with Dan Jacobson when he claims that resentment "cannot coexist with the belief that no wrong was done" (2013, 103).

But in claiming that there's something good about someone's getting what she deserves (say, X), I'm not claiming (nor am I denying) that it would be *overall* good that she gets X. Rather, I'm claiming only that the world in which she gets X and deserves X is, other things being equal, non-instrumentally better than the world in which she gets X but doesn't deserve X. Thus, to claim that someone deserves to suffer the unpleasantness of guilt is not to claim that it would be overall good that she suffers this unpleasantness, for the goodness of her getting what she deserves may be insufficient to compensate for the badness of her suffering this unpleasantness. But even if her getting what she deserves isn't overall good, it does seem that we should prefer the world in which she suffers and deserves to so suffer to an otherwise equivalent world in which she identically suffers but doesn't deserve to so suffer.

It's also important to note that blaming someone involves representing her, not as someone who deserves to suffer just any sort of unpleasantness, but as someone who deserves to suffer only the specific unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse.⁸ What's more, blaming her involves representing her as deserving of this *in virtue of her having violated a legitimate demand* (Darwall 2013, 16). Thus, blame must involve holding its target accountable for *the violation of a legitimate demand* and not merely for *the failure to meet some normative standard*. After all, it seems that someone can be responsible for having failed to meet a normative standard without being blameworthy.

To illustrate, consider that although my prose clearly lacks the style and elegance that you find in Oscar Wilde's writing, I can't rightly be blamed for this. For even if I could, with tremendous effort, meet such a standard, no one (not even myself) can legitimately demand that I go to such lengths given that I'm writing for those who have no right to demand such style and elegance from me: fellow academics who prefer precision over style. The thought, then, is that there are normative standards that no one (not even ourselves) can legitimately demand that we meet, and whereas we will always be blameworthy for violating a legitimate demand absent suitable excuse, we won't be blameworthy for failing to meet some normative standard

⁸ An implication of this, which I'm happy to endorse, is that beings that are incapable of feeling guilt, regret, or remorse—e.g., newborns—can't fittingly be blamed.

unless there's some (at least, possible) person who can legitimately demand that we meet it. Thus, the fact that I would fall short of some normative standard if I didn't φ may entail that I ought to φ , but it doesn't entail that I would be blameworthy for failing to φ . After all, what distinguishes that which *ought to be done because it's obligatory* from that which *ought to do be done even though it's not obligatory* is precisely the fact that only the former is conceptually tied to blame such that a failure to perform such an act without suitable excuse entails blameworthiness.⁹

Admittedly, some deny this, thinking that people can be blameworthy for performing 'suberogatory acts' (Driver 1992). Suberogatory acts are acts that are morally optional despite being *morally worse* than some morally permissible alternative. As such, they're the negative analogue of supererogatory acts—acts that are morally optional despite being *morally better* than some morally permissible alternative. The idea that suberogatory acts can be blameworthy poses a problem for my proposal given both that suberogatory acts are morally optional and that it's illegitimate to demand that an agent perform such an act. Unsurprisingly, though, I think that we should just deny that suberogatory acts are ever blameworthy. Yet some think that it can be appropriate to resent (or otherwise blame) an agent for performing a suberogatory act.¹⁰ To illustrate, consider the following example.

Kidney Donation: Roger and Bob are brothers. Bob is suffering from severe kidney failure. His only hope is to obtain a transplanted kidney, and the only compatible donor is Roger. If Roger donates the kidney, people respond with intense approval, because he is making a large optional sacrifice. But if he does not donate the kidney, the disapproval is also intense, even though Roger has no obligation to donate his kidney to his brother, or to anybody. Bob has no right, or entitlement, to the kidney. (Driver 1992, 287)

⁹ See, for instance, Darwall (2010, 142–43) and Portmore (2019, 11).

¹⁰ See, for instance, Macnamara (2013, 45). Others are less sure about whether resentment is appropriate and are confident only that anger is appropriate—see, for instance, Shoemaker (2015, 95). I concede that anger can be an appropriate response to the suberogatory, but whereas I accept that resentment is sufficient for blame, I deny that generic anger (as opposed to specifically indignant anger) is.

Now, it's clear that Roger's refusing to donate his kidney is morally worse than his agreeing to donate it. But it's not at all clear that his refusing to do so is morally optional and, thus, supererogatory. For it's not at all clear that it's illegitimate for Bob, or for others, to morally demand that Roger donate his kidney. Of course, I admit that Bob doesn't have the right to Roger's kidney in the sense that entitles him or others to forcibly extract it from Roger. But it can be legitimate to morally demand that someone ϕ s even if one is morally prohibited from forcing her to ϕ . What's more, it seems that whether it would be legitimate for Bob to demand that Roger donate his kidney depends, as Hallie Liberto (2012) points out, on our answers to the following sorts of questions: Is it permissible for Roger to be so partial to himself that he's permitted to choose preserving an extra kidney for himself to preserving the life of his brother? Will Bob actually die if he doesn't get Roger's kidney, or will he just be forced to live on dialysis for a few more years? What kind of relationship does Roger and his brother have? What has Bob done for Roger in the past and vice versa?

It seems that we need answers to such questions before we can determine whether Roger is obligated to donate his kidney to his brother. Of course, regardless of how we answer such questions, it will be morally best for Roger to donate his kidney. And, thus, it will be something that Roger morally ought to do. But whether donating his kidney is something that Roger is morally *obligated* to do depends on how we answer such questions. And it seems that if we answer them in such a way that it's intuitive to think that Roger is morally obligated to donate his kidney, then it will also be intuitive to think that he'll be blameworthy for refusing to do so. But if, instead, we answer them in such a way that it's intuitive to think that Roger isn't morally obligated to donate his kidney, then it will be intuitive to think that he won't be blameworthy for refusing to do so. So, I don't see supererogatory acts as posing a problem for my analysis of blame. As my analysis implies, it seems that people are blameworthy only for doing what's wrong and not simply for doing something that's morally worse than some morally permissible alternative.¹¹

¹¹ Another worry along these lines, suggested to me by Philip Swenson, is that someone can be blameworthy for always doing no more than the bare minimum. But I don't think that this is an instance of someone's being blameworthy for performing a supererogatory set of acts. Rather, I think that it's an instance of someone's violating the

So, I believe that my proposal is right in insisting that blaming someone necessitates representing them as having violated a legitimate demand and not merely as having fallen short of some normative standard. But it's important to note that it's not just others that can make legitimate demands of ourselves. We too can do so. And, thus, we can blame ourselves for violating our own demands. Indeed, as David Shoemaker and Manuel Vargas (2019) note, "there are plenty of cases in which I may blame myself for failing to live up to ideals that I, and only I, have set for myself—for example, athletic, aesthetic, or religious ideals." And, as J. David Velleman (2003) notes, we often blame ourselves for failing to keep to some self-commitment—e.g., a commitment to maintain a certain diet or exercise regimen. So, another advantage of my proposal is that it accounts for the fact that we blame ourselves not only for failing to meet the demands of others but also for failing to meet our own demands.

And it's no accident that my proposal makes no mention of morality in specifying these demands. For, as some of the above examples illustrate, the legitimate demands that we set for ourselves needn't be moral demands. They can instead be aesthetic, athletic, religious, or prudential. Thus, my proposal accounts for the fact that we blame ourselves not only for our moral failings, but also for our non-moral failings: for our aesthetic bad taste, gustatory self-indulgence, or poor athletic performance. And our blame of others can be non-moral as well. For instance, as T. M. Scanlon (2013, 88) has pointed out, "a Mafioso can be said to blame an associate for violating the code of *omertà*" (by, say, ratting him out to the FBI) even if he admits that his associate hasn't thereby violated any moral demand and has, in fact, done what he was morally required to do.¹²

Lastly, my proposal allows that the target of blame can be either oneself or another, for it holds that the target of blame may or may not be identical to the blamer. And, thus, it accounts for the fact that blame can be either intrapersonal or interpersonal. What's more, it allows that

legitimate demand to do more than just the bare minimum required to fulfill all of one's perfect duties. For it's legitimate to demand that people also fulfill their imperfect duties, and these duties require us to do more than just always doing the bare minimum to fulfill our perfect duties.

¹² Other proponents of the view that we can be blamed for our perceived non-moral failings include Björnsson (2017) and Matheson & Milam (2019).

the target can be dead or alive, as well as near or far away. After all, on my proposal, blaming need involve only both a feeling of disapproval and a representation of desert. And we can both disapprove of those who are dead or far away as well as represent them as having deserved (or being deserving) of the relevant sort of unpleasantness.

To sum up, I have shown in this section that blame requires more than mere evaluation but less than the deliberate infliction of suffering.¹³ That is, I've shown that blame involves a change in attitudes such that one must disapprove of, or be disappointed in, its target but that it needn't involve one's having the intention to make that target suffer. And I've shown that blame must involve representing its target as deserving to suffer the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse and that it must represent this as being so in virtue of the target's having violated a legitimate demand and not merely having fallen short of some normative standard. I've shown that blame needn't involve the belief that its target is blameworthy. And, thus, I've shown that blame can be recalcitrant. I've shown how, on my proposal, blame can be public or private, moral or non-moral, and intrapersonal or interpersonal. So, just in spelling out my proposal, I've already established that it can account for a lot of the diversity in our blaming practices. But there's even more that it can account for, as I'll now show.

2. What Else My Proposal Accounts for

As George Sher and several others have noted, blame can be dispassionate such that it involves no anger, hostility, or resentment toward its target.¹⁴ "We may, for example, feel no hostility toward the loved one whom we blame for failing to tell a sensitive acquaintance a hard truth, the criminal whom we blame for a burglary we read about in the newspaper, or the historical figure whom we blame for the misdeeds he performed long ago" (Sher 2006, 88). It's a merit of my proposal, then, that it allows for this in that one can feel disapproval without feeling any

¹³ In fact, it doesn't require any evaluative judgments (or other sorts of beliefs) beyond those, if any, that are constitutive of feeling disapproval of, or disappointment, in the target of blame.

¹⁴ See Brown (forthcoming), Smith (2013, 32), and Shoemaker & Vargas (2019).

anger, hostility, or other passion. Of course, my account also allows for blame to be passionate. It is, after all, quite common to register one's disapproval via anger and resentment. The key point, then, is that one can feel disapproval with or without anger, hostility, and resentment. And, so, my proposal allows that blame can be either passionate or dispassionate.

My proposal also allows that we can, contrary to what Scanlon claims, blame people without intending to modify our relationships with them. As Susan Wolf has noted, sometimes when we blame close family members there is a lot of screaming and remonstrance but no relationship modification (2011, 334). For, when it comes to certain family members, we have resigned ourselves to continuing on with the relationship despite everything. Of course, this doesn't prevent us from blaming them by both disapproving of their behavior and representing them as deserving of the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse. Indeed, our blaming them may be part of our relationship's regular cycle in which they wrong us, we express our resentment, they express their remorse, and then we forgive them and continue on with the relationship as always.

Another merit of my proposal is that it does a nice job of accounting for the motivational tendencies associated with blame. Take self-blame. In blaming oneself for having ϕ -ed, one must suffer the unpleasantness of feeling disapproval of, or disappointment in, oneself for having violated a legitimate demand, which in turn involves one's feeling guilt, regret, or remorse for having ϕ -ed. Such feelings are, of course, painful. And although the typical motivational tendency associated with pain is avoidance, the main motivational tendency associated with self-blame is to seek it out both by continuing to dwell upon one's transgression and by reaching out to those whom one has transgressed so that they can further inflame one's guilt with their expressions of anger and resentment. As Herbert Morris puts it, "the man who feels guilty often seeks pain and somehow sees it as appropriate because of his guilt. ...When we think of what it is to feel guilty then, we think...of something that is owed; and pain is somehow connected with paying what one owes" (1976, 89–90).

My proposal accounts for this, because it holds that blaming oneself entails representing oneself as deserving to suffer the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse. Thus, in blaming

oneself, it must seem that it would, to some extent, be non-instrumentally good that one suffers in this way. And this in turn explains why we're disposed to do what will inflame these feelings rather than what will extinguish them. For whereas there seems to be nothing bad about our avoiding, say, headache pain, there does seem to be something bad about our avoiding our fitting guilt, regret, or remorse (Duggan 2018, 298). And this isn't just because headache pain isn't the sort of thing that can be fitting, where an attitude is fitting if and only if its representations are accurate.¹⁵ After all, fear can be fitting even though there is nothing non-instrumentally good about our suffering the unpleasantness of fitting fear.¹⁶ Thus, the reason that it's non-instrumentally good to suffer fitting guilt but not fitting fear is that it's only the former that is deserved.¹⁷ And it's the fact that it's deserved—and, thus, to some extent non-instrumentally good to suffer—that explains why we are often motivated to seek it out and almost never motivated to try to rid ourselves of it. Moreover, this is true not only of the unpleasantness that we suffer when we feel guilty for violating a moral demand, but also of the unpleasantness that we suffer when we “beat ourselves up” for failing to live up to our own non-moral demands—e.g., our failure to keep to a diet or our failure to anticipate an obvious objection to our view.

¹⁵ I believe that the norm of fittingness—the norm holding that it's inappropriate to have an attitude whose representations are inaccurate—is robustly normative. That is, it is a norm that we necessarily have some reason to care about and abide by. In this respect, it differs from the norms for appropriate business attire, which we only contingently have some reason to care about and abide by. To use Derek Parfit's terminology (2011, 144), the norm of fittingness is normative in *the reason-involving sense*, whereas the norms of appropriate business attire are normative only in *the rule-involving sense*.

¹⁶ Fitting grief is a bit more complicated. There does seem to be something bad about taking a pill to get rid of one's fitting grief—at least, when the loss is relatively recent. But I suspect that this is because it may count as disrespectful to the one lost or as a form of denial that hinders one's ability to heal from that loss. In any case, the fact that there is nothing problematic about taking a pill to rid oneself of one's fitting fear in instances where having that fear would be of no instrumental value shows that the mere fittingness of a feeling doesn't make it something that it would be bad to be rid of.

¹⁷ Clearly, one reason that it would often be bad to take a pill to alleviate one's fitting guilt is that experiencing guilt can often be instrumentally valuable in making one less likely to commit future wrongs. Likewise, shame can be instrumentally valuable in helping one to regulate one's future conduct. But it seems that it would be bad to take a pill to alleviate one's fitting guilt even if experiencing that guilt would be of no instrumental value. It would be bad in that one deserves to feel bad for having violated a legitimate demand and it is non-instrumentally good for people to get what they deserve. In this respect, then, guilt differs from shame.

Of course, another motivational tendency associated with self-blame besides this urge for a sort of self-flagellation is what Patricia Greenspan calls the “reparative urge” (1995: 130): the urge to *express* our guilt, regret, or remorse to those we’ve transgressed in an attempt to repair our relationship with them. And this goes hand-in-hand with one of the main motivational tendencies associated with other-blame. For one very common motivation for expressing one’s blame of others is to provoke or inflame guilt, regret, or remorse in those others. As A. P. Duggan (2018, 296) notes, expressed “blame is a form of ‘guilting’ in that blamers intend their blame to result in the blamed feeling guilty for doing wrong.”¹⁸ That is, blamers are often moved to express their blame in the hopes that this will bring their targets both to recognize that they disapprove of what they’ve done and to share in their disapproval by coming to feel guilt, regret, or remorse for what they’ve done.¹⁹

So, in expressing blame, blamers often deliberately aim to cause their targets to suffer. But, of course, this is potentially morally problematic, for it’s morally impermissible to deliberately inflict suffering on others unless either they deserve to so suffer or doing so is the only way to ensure a fair distribution of undeserved burdens. But despite being potentially morally problematic, expressions of blame actually seem to be *pro tanto* morally permissible—at least, when their targets are blameworthy (Carlsson 2017, 95).²⁰ This means that either the blameworthy must deserve to suffer or having them suffer must be the only way to ensure a fair distribution of undeserved burdens. Yet it’s unclear why either would be the case? After all, to be blameworthy is just to be someone whom it is fitting to blame, where the fittingness of blame is just a matter of its constitutive attitudes being accurate in their representations.²¹ So why

¹⁸ See also Carlsson (forthcoming), Fricker (2016, 167), Macnamara (2015, 559), McKenna (2012, 139–40), and Wolf (2011, 338).

¹⁹ As Hannah Tierney and others have pointed out, another reason we’re often motivated to express our blame to those who have transgressed us is as a means of standing up for ourselves by expressing our sense of dignity and self-respect. See Tierney (2019), Murphy (2005, 19), and Reis-Dennis (forthcoming).

²⁰ To say that it is *pro tanto* morally permissible for us to express our blame of the blameworthy is not to say that it is always morally permissible to do so. After all, we will, sometimes, lack the moral standing to do so. And other times it will be too risky to do so, as where the target is suicidal. I’ll have more to say about this in the next section.

²¹ Andreas Brekke Carlsson (2017) denies that to be blameworthy is to be one whom is fittingly blamed, but one of his main motivations for doing so is that he sees no way to account for the *pro tanto* moral permissibility of expressing

think that the accuracy of these representations depends upon either its target deserving to suffer or its being fair to make the target suffer? After all, it's fitting to distrust those who are untrustworthy regardless of whether they deserve to suffer the burden of being distrusted or whether it would be fair to make them suffer this burden.

Given that it's fitting to distrust the untrustworthy regardless of whether they deserve to suffer the burdens associated with being distrusted, philosophers such as Pamela Hieronymi (2004, 119–20) have argued that it is appropriate to express one's distrust of the untrustworthy even if they don't deserve to suffer the burdens associated with being distrusted, and even if there's nothing fair about their having to suffer such burdens. Now, Hieronymi admits that being the target of expressions of distrust can be just as unpleasant as being the target of expressions of blame. But she argues that this doesn't make our expressing distrust of the untrustworthy unfair or otherwise morally problematic. And, so, she concludes that there's nothing unfair or otherwise morally problematic about our expressing either distrust of the untrustworthy or blame of the blameworthy. Yet there is, I believe, an important difference between expressions of distrust and expressions of blame. Expressions of distrust don't typically aim at causing their targets to suffer. And if they did, they would be morally problematic insofar as their targets don't deserve to so suffer. And, indeed, the untrustworthy needn't deserve to suffer, for they may be untrustworthy due to no fault of their own. By contrast, expressions of blame do typically aim at causing the blameworthy to suffer, for they aim at guiltning their targets. Thus, such expressions will be morally problematic unless, unlike the untrustworthy, the blameworthy necessarily deserve to so suffer. So, if we're to explain the fact that it is *pro tanto* morally permissible to express our blame of the blameworthy despite this

blame of the blameworthy on the view that the blameworthy are, most fundamentally, those who are fittingly blamed. Yet, as I'll now show, there is such a way. And for some of my reasons for rejecting his alternative proposal—i.e., that the blameworthy are, most fundamentally, those who deserve to feel guilty, see my forthcoming-b. Lastly, Carlsson has so far remained neutral on what the correct general account of blame is. So, it's yet to be seen whether his alternative proposal can be combined with such an account to form a whole that's as attractive as the one that I present here.

involving *intentionally* inflicting suffering upon them, we must give an account of blame such that the blameworthy, unlike the untrustworthy, necessarily deserve to suffer.

It's an advantage of my account, then, that it implies that the blameworthy necessarily deserve to suffer.²² On my account, blaming a target T for having ϕ -ed entails representing T as deserving to suffer guilt, regret, or remorse for having ϕ -ed. Thus, it is fitting to blame T such that T is worthy of this blame if and only if this representation is accurate. And it's accurate if and only if T deserves to suffer such feelings. Thus, on my account, the blameworthy necessarily deserve to suffer guilt, regret, or remorse. For, on my account, to be blameworthy is just to have the normative property of deserving to suffer guilt, regret, or remorse. By contrast, Hieronymi holds that to be blameworthy is merely to have the descriptive property of having acted out of ill will. And, so, she thinks that a subject is blameworthy so long as that subject has in fact acted out of ill will. But given that someone can act out of ill will without deserving to suffer (consider, for instance, that young children, lower animals, and the criminally insane can act out of ill will without deserving to suffer given their lack of sufficient control over their actions), Hieronymi can't explain why it is *pro tanto* morally permissible to express blame even though this involves deliberately causing its target to suffer.²³ So, my account has the advantage of allowing us to explain why we expect even morally good people to be motivated to express their blame of the blameworthy with the aim of getting them to suffer the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse.

So, my account implies that a person is blameworthy if and only if she deserves to suffer the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse.²⁴ And this, in turn, implies that if someone has already suffered sufficient guilt, regret, and remorse for her transgression such that she doesn't

²² Many philosophers agree that the blameworthy deserve to suffer the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse—see, for instance, Carlsson (2017, 89) and Duggan (2018, 297).

²³ I borrow this point from Carlsson (2017, 96).

²⁴ Thus, my view accounts for common intuition that the blameworthy deserve to be blamed—see Carlsson 2017, Duggan 2018, and Nelkin 2012. But, unlike views like Carlsson's (2017) that pry the desert of blame apart from the fittingness of blame, it does so without counterintuitively implying that it could be fitting to blame someone who doesn't deserve to be blamed.

deserve to suffer such unpleasantness anymore, then she's no longer blameworthy. And, thus, it's no longer fitting for her or for others to continue to blame her for her transgression.²⁵ Now, this may seem like a problem for my theory, but, as I see, it's a virtue, not a vice. For one, it dovetails nicely with Herbert Morris's observation that "feelings of guilt may disappear and the man [who used to feel guilty] may connect their disappearance with the pain he has experienced" (1976, p. 90). The idea, I take it, is that sufficient self-blame in the form of feelings of guilt, regret, or remorse can undercut the appropriateness of further self-blame as well as of further other-blame, for if you've suffered enough for your transgression, you won't deserve to suffer anymore (1976, p. 62). And this explains why we think that feelings of guilt are *self-consuming* with respect to their fittingness (Na'aman forthcoming). That is, after feeling enough guilt it can become unfitting to continue to feel guilt.²⁶ By contrast, views that hold that guilt for φ -ing is fitting if and only if one was wrong to have φ -ed or manifested ill will in φ -ing are unable to explain this.²⁷

For another, this implication can help me account for the intuition that a subject can fail to be blameworthy for having responsibly done something wrong. To illustrate, consider the following case.

Domestic Abuse: "Sarah's husband has physically and emotionally abused her for many years. She has tried to leave the relationship, but has never had the strength to see it

²⁵ I do, however, want to allow for the possibility that some transgressions are sufficiently heinous that there never comes a point in a human lifetime at which it's unfitting for the transgressor to feel any further guilt, regret, or remorse. Perhaps, all that happens is that it becomes unfitting to feel guilt, regret, and remorse as intensely and as frequently as before.

²⁶ In this respect, guilt differs from grief. No matter how much grief you've already felt, it doesn't ever become unfitting (or even less fitting) for you to continue to feel grief. For grief over X is fitting if and only if it accurately represents X as a loss, and X doesn't become any less of a loss just because you've already felt a lot of grief. By contrast, guilt for your having φ -ed is fitting if and only if it accurately represents you as someone who deserves to suffer the unpleasantness of guilt for having φ -ed. But if you've already suffered as much guilt as you deserve to suffer for having φ -ed, guilt for having φ -ed will cease to be fitting. And this clearly occurs in cases in which one has already punished oneself more than enough for some long ago and relatively minor transgression.

²⁷ For more on this, see my forthcoming-b.

through. One night, as her husband begins to beat her again, Sarah grabs a gun and shoots him dead” (Fritz 2014, 276). She shoots him, not out of ill will, but just because she’s fed up with the beatings. Assume that it was wrong for her to have killed him (given that she could have instead gone to the neighbors and called the police) and that she met all the relevant responsibility conditions (such as the control condition and the epistemic condition) and, so, is normatively responsible for this wrongdoing.

Now, some philosophers such as John Martin Fischer (2006, 233), Michael McKenna (2012, 19), and myself find it intuitive to think that she isn’t blameworthy for having killed her husband even though she is responsible for having committed this wrong. And my account of blame can explain this so long as we assume (plausibly, I think) that someone like Sarah doesn’t deserve to suffer the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse for having killed the person who has abused her for so many years, thereby causing her to breakdown and resort to wrongdoing in order to stop it.²⁸ Of course, this is a tricky case in which we can imagine close variants in which Sarah lacks sufficient control to count as responsible for killing her husband. But insofar as I can imagine that Sarah does meet the relevant responsibility conditions, it does seem to me that she doesn’t deserve to as much blame, if any, as a woman who murders her husband to inherit his money. And it is a merit of my approach that it gives us a plausible explanation for why this is so: there’s a difference in what each deserves.

Another merit of my account of blame is that it can explain why blame is fitting only if certain conditions are met. Take, for instance, *the control condition* (sometimes called *the freedom condition*). It holds that blaming someone for having φ -ed is fitting only if she had the relevant sort of control over whether she was to φ . My proposal can account for this so long as we

²⁸ Superficially, it may seem that McKenna and Fischer want to give a fundamentally different explanation for why Sarah isn’t blameworthy. After all, Fischer claims that “the causal history of the motivational states issuing in the behavior” is what’s relevant to whether Sarah is blameworthy (2007, 186). And McKenna claims that whether the behavior manifests a bad quality of will is what’s relevant to whether Sarah is blameworthy (2012, 19). But these two views differ fundamentally from my own only if we implausibly assume that they think that these things are irrelevant to whether Sarah deserves to suffer the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse.

assume, as seems plausible, that someone deserves to suffer some unpleasantness for having φ -ed only if she had the relevant sort of control over whether she was to φ . Thus, we can offer the following argument for the control condition.

- (P1) Blaming someone for having φ -ed entails representing her as deserving to suffer the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse for having φ -ed. [From Condition 1 of my proposal]
- (P2) For all attitudes x , x is fitting if and only if its representations are accurate. [From my stipulative definition of 'fitting']
- (C1) Thus, blaming someone for having φ -ed is fitting if and only if she deserves to suffer the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse for having φ -ed. [From P1–P2]
- (P3) Someone deserves to suffer some unpleasantness for having φ -ed only if she had the relevant sort of control over whether she was to φ . [Assumption]
- (C2) Therefore, blaming someone for having φ -ed is fitting only if she had the relevant sort of control over whether she was to φ —and this is the control condition. [From C1 and P3]

And we can similarly argue for various other conditions. Take *the epistemic condition* (sometimes called *the knowledge condition*). It holds that blaming someone for having φ -ed is fitting only if she could have been reasonably expected to have known that her φ -ing would entail violating a legitimate demand. And we get an argument for this condition simply by replacing “she had the relevant sort of control over whether she was to φ ” with “she could have been reasonably expected to have known that her φ -ing would entail violating a legitimate demand” throughout the above argument, while replacing “control condition” with “epistemic condition” in C2.

We can also offer the following argument for *the proportionality condition*, which holds that blaming someone to degree D for having φ -ed is fitting only if D is proportional to the stringency of the demand that she violated in φ -ing (see, e.g., Fricker 2016, 168).

- (P1*) Blaming someone to degree D for having φ -ed entails representing her as deserving to suffer to degree D the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse for having φ -ed. [A plausible corollary of Condition 1 of my proposal]
- (P2) For all attitudes x , x is fitting if and only if its representations are accurate. [From my stipulative definition of 'fitting']
- (C1*) Thus, blaming someone to degree D for having φ -ed is fitting if and only if she deserves to suffer to degree D the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse for having φ -ed. [From P1*–P2]
- (P3*) Someone deserves to suffer to degree D the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse for having φ -ed only if D is proportional to the stringency of the demand that she violated in φ -ing. [Assumption]
- (C2*) Therefore, blaming someone to degree D for having φ -ed is fitting only if D is proportional to the stringency of the demand that she violated in φ -ing—and this is the proportionality condition. [From C1* and P3*]

We need to appeal to all three conditions in order to account for our judgments about when it is appropriate to blame people and in what degree.²⁹ And accounting for such judgments is, I believe, crucial, for I agree with Scanlon that “a satisfactory account of blame

²⁹ I readily concede that there may be other conditions for being blameworthy. For instance, it may be that the person-stage who is now to be blamed must be, in certain relevant ways, psychologically similar to (or contiguous with) the person-stage who committed the given transgression. But I won't explore the possibility of such other conditions here. In any case, it seems that these other proposed conditions will be plausible only insofar as they're plausible conditions for a target's deserving to suffer guilt, regret, or remorse in virtue of something that some earlier person-stage did.

should be as faithful as possible to the phenomenology of blaming and to our judgments about when it is appropriate to blame people and in what degree” (2013, 84). So, consider that without the proportionality condition we have no way of accounting for the fact that it would, other things being equal, be inappropriate for us to blame someone who has violated a less stringent demand more harshly than we blame someone who has violated a more stringent demand. It would, for instance, be inappropriate for us to blame someone who has told a self-serving but relatively harmless lie more harshly than we blame someone who has committed murder.

We need the epistemic condition to explain why non-culpable ignorance can excuse one from being the fitting target of blame for having violated a legitimate demand. For instance, even if it’s legitimate to demand that I not bring the virus that I’m carrying into the office, it’s inappropriate to blame me for doing so if I couldn’t have been reasonably expected to have known that I was infected.

Lastly, we need to appeal to the control condition to explain both why the only agents that we can appropriately blame are those who possess the relevant sort of control and why the only things that we can appropriately *directly* blame them for are those things over which they directly exert such control.³⁰ Thus, the control condition explains why newborns and lower animals—both of which lack the relevant sort of control—are exempt from blame. And it explains why normal adult human beings cannot appropriately be blamed for their muscle twitches or reflex actions given that they lack the relevant sort of control over these bodily movements. What’s more, it explains why a drunk driver can’t be held directly responsible for failing to react in time but only for that which led to her inability to react in time—assuming that that’s something over which she did exert the relevant sort of control. Perhaps, then, the

³⁰ Note, then, that I deny what’s known as resultant moral luck (Zimmerman 1987): the idea that one’s degree of accountability for ϕ -ing can be affected by the uncontrolled events that determine the results of one’s ϕ -ing. For some compelling arguments against resultant moral luck, see Khoury 2018. And for some experimental evidence suggesting that what most affects our judgments about an agent’s degree of accountability for some act is not whether, by luck, the act had a bad result but whether we judge that the agent was unjustified in believing that her act had little chance of having that bad result, see Young, Nichols, & Saxe 2010. Also, some take Frankfurt-style cases as evidence against the control condition, but see Portmore forthcoming-a and Portmore 2019 for a rebuttal.

only thing that we can appropriately hold her directly responsible for is her having started to drink without having first arranged for a designated driver.

Of course, some cite the fact that we often take ourselves to be (normatively) responsible for non-agential things—e.g., for desiring what’s bad, believing what’s contrary to the evidence, and intending to do what’s incompatible with our ultimate ends—as reason for being skeptical of the control condition. But the fact that we can be responsible for such things doesn’t give us reason to doubt the control condition, but reason to doubt only that the relevant sort of control is as narrow as agential/voluntary control. To understand why, we must understand what voluntary control consists in and why we must exert it over our actions to be responsible for them.

For a subject to have *voluntary control* over an action is for her to have volitional control over whether she performs it while having rational control over whether she forms the volitions that would result in her performing it. She has *volitional control* over whether she performs the act so long as, holding everything else fixed, whether she performs it just depends on whether she forms the volition (e.g., the intention) to perform it, and she has *rational control* over whether she forms the intention to perform it so long as, holding everything else fixed, whether she forms this intention just depends on whether and how she responds to the relevant reasons. Note, then, that volitional control over our actions is insufficient to ground responsibility for them. After all, just as I have volitional control over whether I raise my hand, a cat presumably has volitional control over whether it will swat at the mouse that scurries by. Yet, presumably, a cat is not responsible for swatting at the mouse because whether it forms the volition to swat isn’t under its rational control. That is, whether it forms this volition is just a matter of some instinctual—and, thus, non-reasons-responsive—mechanism. By contrast, I can be responsible for raising my hand given that (or insofar as) whether I form the volition to do so is reasons-responsive and, thus, under my rational control. This, I’ve argued elsewhere (Portmore 2019), suggests that what really matters for responsibility is rational control. Indeed, it seems that the only reason that we need to have volitional control over our actions to be responsible for them is that it’s only by having volitional control over our actions that we come to have rational control

over them.³¹ This is because we cannot act directly in response to our reasons; we act in response to our reasons only by being guided by our reasons to form the volitions that will, if the world cooperates, result in our acting as we so will to act.

It seems, then, that we need the control condition in conjunction with the idea that the relevant sort of control is rational control to adequately distinguish between those things for which we can be held responsible—e.g., our beliefs, intentions, and voluntary actions—and those things for which we can't be held responsible—e.g., our sensations, pangs of hunger, and involuntary actions. The former are those things over which we exert rational control and the latter are those things over which we lack such control. So, I admit that many of the things that we hold each other responsible for are non-agential and, thus, are things over which we lack voluntary control. But this shows, not that we should reject the control condition, but only that we should accept that the relevant sort of control is rational control. And, so, it's a merit of my proposal that it allows us to account for the fact that we can fittingly be directly blamed for the non-agential. Since, on my proposal, the variable ' φ ' ranges over all of T's *options* and not just T's voluntary *actions*, it allows that we can be fittingly blamed for our non-agential options.³² And, thus, we can, on my proposal, be accountable for such things as desiring what's bad, believing what's contrary to the evidence, and intending to do what's incompatible with our ultimate ends—and this is so despite the fact that we lack voluntary control over such things.

This is important, because it seems that we can be responsible for our actions only if we can be responsible for the non-agential—specifically, for the formations of our beliefs and intentions. For as I've just shown, we can be responsible for the actions that stem from our volitions only if we're responsible for the volitions that gave rise to them. And, as both Nikolaj Nottlemann (2007) and Rik Peels (2017) have shown, we can be responsible for our actions and their effects only if we're responsible for our beliefs about their effects. This is because of the

³¹ See also McHugh (2017, 2,749).

³² An option is just whatever can be the object of an 'ought'. Thus, our options include not only actions, but also non-actions, such as the formation of any reasons-responsive attitude—e.g., a belief, desire, or intention. After all, it makes perfect sense to say that I ought to believe what's true, desire what's good, and intend to do what's the necessary means to my ultimate ends.

epistemic condition. According to the epistemic condition, one can be responsible for acting in violation of a legitimate demand only if one could have been reasonably expected to have known that so acting would constitute the violation of such a demand. To illustrate, it seems that I can be responsible for infecting my co-workers with a virus by coming into the office only if I could have been reasonably expected to have known (and, thus, to have believed) that my doing so would infect them. So, given the epistemic condition, it seems that I can be responsible for my actions and their effects only if I'm responsible for my beliefs about their effects. And, so, if we're going to be blameworthy for anything, including our voluntary actions, the correct account of blame better allow, as mine does, for the possibility that we can be fittingly blamed for the non-agential.

Of course, many will concede that we can be fittingly blamed for the non-agential but claim that this responsibility for the non-agential must be indirect. That is, they'll appeal to the well-known tracing strategy to account for our responsibility for our forming the relevant beliefs and intentions. Now, there are, I believe, several problems with this strategy when it comes to accounting for our responsibility for such attitudes—not the least of which that it can lead to an infinite regress. But because many of these problems have been elucidated elsewhere, I'll mention just one below.³³

Those who employ the tracing strategy hold that someone can be responsible for, say, forming the belief that *p* even if this was never under her voluntary control. For they hold her responsible for forming this belief in virtue of her having had voluntary control over some prior act such that she wouldn't have formed this belief had she performed (or refrained from performing) this act. So, for instance, if someone fallaciously forms the belief that taking vitamin supplements causes an increase in longevity solely on the basis of an established correlation between taking vitamin supplements and increased longevity, the tracing strategist would claim that she's responsible (although only indirectly) for forming this fallacious belief in virtue of her having been directly responsible for, say, voluntarily skipping the relevant critical

³³ For criticisms of the tracing strategy (where only indirect blame is appropriate for the non-agential), see Smith 2015, Vargas 2005, McKenna 2008, and Portmore forthcoming-a.

thinking class—that is, the class that, had she attended, would have prevented her from making this fallacious inference. But the problem with this strategy is that it holds that what she’s directly responsible for is her skipping class rather than her fallacious inference. That is, on this strategy, the demand that she is ultimately accountable for violating is, not the epistemic demand that she not infer causation solely on the basis of correlation, but the practical demand that she attend useful classes. But, intuitively, it seems that what she’s ultimately accountable for is violating an epistemic demand. And this is why, when we interact with her, we’re much more likely to exhort her for failing to respond appropriately to the epistemic reasons that she had for not making such an inference than we are to exhort her for failing to respond appropriately to the practical reasons that she had for attending useful classes. And this suggests that what we actually hold her accountable for is violating an epistemic demand, not a practical demand, as the tracing strategist insists.

3. What about the Standing to Blame and the Appropriateness of Forgiveness?

I’ve claimed that it is *pro tanto* morally permissible to express blame of the blameworthy. But, of course, the fact that this permission is merely *pro tanto* means that it will sometimes be morally impermissible to express blame of the blameworthy. Indeed, it will be morally impermissible to do so whenever doing so would potentially have disastrous consequences, as where, say, the blameworthy target is suicidal. And it will be morally impermissible to do so whenever the blamer lacks the standing to do so.

Expressing blame of the blameworthy can be morally impermissible because of what it is to be blameworthy. To be blameworthy is not to be someone to whom it is morally permissible to express one’s blame, but rather to be someone whom it is fitting to blame, where this is a matter of the attitudes that are constitutive of blaming being accurate in their representations. Thus, expressions of blame can be inappropriate even if the associated blame is appropriate—that is, fitting. For we must, as David Shoemaker does (2015, 221–3), draw a sharp distinction between the appropriateness of having the attitudes that are constitutive of blaming and the appropriateness of expressing those attitudes (or even acting as if one were expressing

those attitudes). The latter is an overt, deliberate act, whereas the former is neither. Consequently, as Andreas Brekke Carlsson (forthcoming) points out, “the former...is matter of fittingness: whether the emotion correctly appraises its object. The latter is a matter of ethics: whether the harsh treatment is fair or deserved.”

There are many possible reasons why it could be morally impermissible for you to express your blame even if that blame is accurate in its representations. One reason is that it would be hypocritical of you to do so. Another is that it’s not your place to interject yourself in this sort of private matter by doing so—because, say, it’s none of your business. Yet another is that you lack the moral authority to do so. For instance, if you’ve already told someone that you’ve forgiven her, you no longer have the authority (and, thus, the standing) to express further blame for the forgiven transgression.

And it’s not just the expression of blame that can be wrong. As far as my account goes, it can be wrong to blame someone whom it is fitting to blame just as it can be wrong to be amused by a racist, but genuinely amusing, joke. This is because my account of blame implies only that it’s fitting to blame someone who has violated a legitimate demand. It doesn’t, however, imply that it is prudent, moral, or rational to blame such a person. We can ask whether it is prudent to blame such a person, whether it is moral to blame such a person, or whether it is rational to blame such a person. But none of these is equivalent to asking whether it is fitting to blame such a person. For it is only the latter that depends solely on whether blaming such a person involves representing things as they are.³⁴

And just as my account allows that it can be immoral and irrational to blame the blameworthy (i.e., those whom it is fitting to blame), it also allows that it can be moral and rational to forgive—and, thus, to cease blaming—the blameworthy. For even if it’s fitting to blame someone, it may not be prudent to do so. In this respect, blaming is like grieving. Even when such an attitude would be correct in its representations of its object, having that attitude can be detrimental to its subject. And this explains how it can be moral and rational for a subject

³⁴ This point comes from D’Arms & Jacobson 2000.

to act so to eschew blaming someone whom it would be fitting for her to blame. So, it's a merit of my proposal that it is compatible both with it's being immoral and irrational to blame the blameworthy and with it's being moral and rational to forgive the blameworthy.

4. Conclusion

I've argued that we should accept the following account of blame.

My Proposal: For any subject S, any potential target T (where T may or may not be identical to S), and any φ , S blames T for having supposedly φ -ed if and only if both of the following conditions are met: (Condition 1) it seems to S as if (a) T has φ -ed, (b) T has violated a legitimate demand in φ -ing, and (c) T deserves to suffer the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse in virtue of having violated this legitimate demand and (Condition 2) S feels, as a result of these seemings, disapproval of, or disappointment in, T for having supposedly φ -ed.

I've argued that Condition 2 is necessary because blame must involve some shift in the blamer's attitudes toward the target. That shift needn't involve anger or hostility but it must at least involve disapproval or disappointment. And I've argued that Condition 1 is necessary to explain the following facts about blame: (1) the blameworthy deserve to be blamed, (2) a subject can fail to be blameworthy for having responsibly done something wrong, (3) blaming someone for having φ -ed is fitting only if she had the relevant sort of control over whether she was to φ , (4) blaming someone for having φ -ed is fitting only if she could have been reasonably expected to have known that her φ -ing would entail violating a legitimate demand, (5) blaming someone to degree D for having φ -ed is fitting only if D is proportional to the stringency of the demand that she violated in φ -ing, (6) blaming someone for having φ -ed is fitting only if she violated a legitimate demand, (7) although we tend to avoid most sorts of unpleasantness, we tend, in blaming ourselves, to seek out the unpleasantness that comes with guilt, regret, and remorse, (8) after feeling enough guilt it can become unfitting to continue to feel guilt, and (9) it's *pro tanto*

morally permissible to express one's blame of blameworthy with the aim of making her suffer the unpleasantness of guilt, regret, or remorse.

What's more, I've argued that these two conditions are jointly sufficient in that we don't need anything beyond the above two specified mental states to blame someone. The fact that blame can be dispassionate shows that we needn't have any passion, such as anger, to blame someone. The fact that we can blame people without expressing our blame and without intending to change our relationships with those whom we're blaming shows that we needn't form any intention or perform any action to blame someone. And the fact that blame can be recalcitrant shows that we can blame someone without believing that she is blameworthy, has done wrong, or has manifested ill will.

Thus, I've argued that we should accept that these two conditions are individually necessary and jointly sufficient. And I've shown that this proposal allows us to account for blame in all its manifest diversity, including the fact that blame can be moral or non-moral, agential or non-agential, passionate or dispassionate, and interpersonal or intrapersonal. Lastly, I've shown that my proposal can account both for cases in which a subject lacks the standing to intentionally express her fitting blame and for cases in which she ought to forgive those whom it would be fitting for her to blame. So, I think that many philosophers have been too quick to give up on the possibility of providing a constitutive analysis of blame. As my proposal suggests, it seems that we can provide a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that accurately specifies blame's extension and does so in terms of its constitution as opposed to its function.³⁵

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