**Deserving to Suffer**

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**Abstract:** I argue that the blameworthy deserve to suffer in that they deserve to feel guilt, which is the unpleasant experience of appreciating one’s apparent culpability for having done wrong. I argue that the blameworthy deserve to feel guilt because they owe it to those whom they’ve culpably wronged to (a) hold themselves accountable, (b) manifest the proper regard for those whom they’ve wronged, and (c) appreciate their culpability for, and the moral significance of, their wrongdoing. And I argue that the blameworthy must feel guilt to satisfy a–c. What’s more, I argue that, in thinking about whether the blameworthy deserve to feel guilt, we need to compare the world in which the blameworthy feel guilt to the world in which the non-blameworthy feel guilt, for, as I argue, it’s insufficient to compare only the world in which the blameworthy feel guilt to the world in which the blameworthy don’t feel guilt.

**1. Introduction**

The blameworthy are those who have freely and knowingly done wrong. Having freely and knowingly done wrong, they lack any excuse for their wrongdoing. Given this, some think that they deserve to suffer. They endorse the following thesis.

 *Deserved Suffering:* The blameworthy deserve to suffer.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Others, however, are skeptical.[[2]](#footnote-2) Indeed, some find this thesis “morally indefensible” (Scanlon 1998: 274).

Recently, however, a somewhat different thesis has received a lot of attention. It’s this:

*Deserved Guilt:* The blameworthy deserve to feel guilt, but only regarding their culpable wrongdoing and only to the appropriate degree and at the appropriate times.

Although distinct, this thesis entails Deserved Suffering—or, at least, it does if we accept the following two assumptions. Assumption 1 is that either suffering is an essential element in feeling guilt or feeling guilt is just a type of suffering. Assumption 2 is that, for all G and all S, if someone deserves G, and if either S is an essential element in G or G is just a type of S, then that someone deserves S.

We should accept Assumption 1, for it seems that feeling guilt is just a type of suffering: the type that involves having the unpleasant experience of appreciating one’s apparent culpability for having done wrong.[[3]](#footnote-3) And even if I were wrong about this, we should at least concede that suffering is an essential element in feeling guilt. For consider that, in feeling guilt, it’s not enough merely to believe that one is culpable or to intend to do better in the future. What you’re feeling must be painful. If it isn’t painful, it isn’t guilt. Indeed, this is widely accepted in the literature. What’s more, those who go on to explain why suffering is essential to feeling guilt typically claim, as I have, that it is because feeling guilt is just a type of suffering.[[4]](#footnote-4)

We should also, I believe, accept Assumption 2. I don’t have any argument for it; it just seems intuitive. Consider that if you deserve to feel guilt and feeling guilt is a type of suffering, then you must deserve to suffer. For, in that case, you deserve to suffer this type of suffering. Consider also that if you deserve to feel guilt and suffering is an essential element in feeling guilt, then you must deserve to suffer. After all, if you deserved to experience only some non-painful element of guilt (e.g., the element in which you believe that you did wrong), then you wouldn’t deserve to feel guilt. You would instead deserve only to experience that non-painful element of guilt (e.g., the belief that you did wrong).

Note, then, that to say that someone deserves to suffer is not to say that, for any type of painful experience, they deserve to have it. The blameworthy don’t deserve to suffer loneliness, hopelessness, or physical pain. Thus, it’s important to realize that Deserved Suffering amounts only to the claim that there is at least one type of painful experience that the blameworthy deserve to have. And, according to Deserved Guilt, that’s feelings of guilt: the unpleasant experience of appreciating one’s apparent culpability for having done wrong. Thus, Deserved Guilt entails Deserved Suffering.

This entailment and the fact that Deserved Guilt often comes off as less controversial than Deserved Suffering explains why the focus in the literature has recently shifted from the latter to the former. Deserved Guilt strikes many of us as less controversial given that what most readily comes to mind when we consider Deserved Suffering is some sort of harsh retributive punishment, such as our taking an eye for an eye or God’s punishing unrepentant sinners with eternal hellfire.[[5]](#footnote-5) But the idea that the blameworthy deserve to suffer feelings of guilt in response to their culpable wrongdoing is much more palatable than the idea that such harsh punishments are deserved (McKenna 2012: 128–34). Indeed, even skeptics regarding Deserved Guilt are willing to concede that there’s something “very intuitively appealing” about it (Nelkin 2019: 175).

But despite all this recent attention as well as this concession from skeptics, there’s no sign of any consensus developing concerning Deserved Guilt. To some, it just “seems obvious; to others it is contentious, non-obvious, or even false” (Nelkin 2019: 174).[[6]](#footnote-6) And, as Rachel Achs (2024: 794) notes:

the question of whether wrongdoers basically deserve to feel guilty promises to remain a site of philosophical impasse because the premises which support the affirmative view tend to be unacceptable to some philosophers. Non-retributivists, who find the idea that there is non-instrumental goodness or justice in anyone’s suffering to be “morally repugnant” (Scanlon, 2013: 102) and “completely implausible or even abhorrent” (Menges ms: 27), don’t tend to share the intuitions that undergird claims of guilt’s basic desert.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Yet it’s essential that we determine whether Deserved Guilt is true. For if it is, then we must determine what kind of control agents need to have over their actions to deserve to suffer in this way for performing them. And then we must determine whether we have this kind of freedom or control. No less than the legitimacy of our ordinary practice of holding each other accountable for our actions is at stake. For instance, it’s common practice for us to express our resentment to those who have wronged us with the intention of getting them to feel guilt for what they’ve done. But if the blameworthy don’t deserve to suffer such feelings of guilt, then intentionally inflicting such suffering on them would be *pro tanto* morally wrong.

 I suspect that at least part of the reason why the debate over Deserved Guilt has so far seemed intractable is that many in the literature have not yet adequately understood the thesis or its implications. Indeed, I will argue that the thesis is actually much weaker and, thus, more plausible than many have supposed.[[8]](#footnote-8) I will argue that to hold that the blameworthy deserve to feel guilt amounts to no more than claiming that, as a matter of justice, the blameworthy owe it to those whom they’ve culpably wronged to (a) hold themselves accountable, (b) manifest the proper regard for those whom they’ve wronged, and (c) appreciate their culpability for, and the moral significance of, their wrongdoing. But, first, I’ll start by explaining where some of the recent discussions of Deserved Guilt indicate a failure to adequately understand the thesis and its implications.

**2. Desert and the Relevant Cross-World Comparisons**

To say that a subject deserves to experience E is to say that, in virtue of their prior activities or possessed characteristics, they merit E in a certain sense. That sense is the one where someone’s meriting E in this sense entails that the world in which they experience E is, other things being equal, more just and, consequently, non-instrumentally better than the world in which someone who doesn’t merit E in this sense experiences E. Thus, the claim that the blameworthy deserve to feel guilt entails the claim that, in virtue of their culpable wrongdoing, the world in which they, the blameworthy, feel guilt is, other things being equal, more just and, consequently, non-instrumentally better than the world in which the non-blameworthy feel guilt.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Thus, the relevant sense of ‘merit’ is the one in which the gracious merit gratitude, which I call *the justice-implicating sense*. Of course, there’s another sense of merit: the one in which the fearsome or dangerous merit fear. I call this *the truth-implicating sense*. These two are distinct because not everything that’s merited in the truth-implicating sense is merited in the justice-implicating sense.[[10]](#footnote-10) Thus, whereas the proposition “Those with feature F merit experience E in the justice-implicating sense” implies “Those who are F deserve E,” the proposition “Those with feature F merit experience E in the truth-implicating sense” doesn’t. The latter implies only that it’s *true* that those who are F are as E appraises them. Thus, whereas the gracious deserve our gratitude, the dangerous don’t deserve our fear. It’s only that our fear appraises them accurately: that is, as posing a danger to us. To avoid confusion, then, I’ll use the term ‘fitting’ to denote ‘meriting in the truth-implicating sense’, and I’ll use the term ‘deserve’ to denote ‘meriting in the justice-implicating sense’.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Fear appraises its intentional object as posing a danger to its subject. Thus, something merits our fear in the truth-implicating sense if and only if it poses a danger to us. In other words, it’s fitting for us to fear all and only that which poses a danger to us. Nevertheless, it is not at all unjust for us to fail to fear that which poses a danger to us. Nor is the world in which we fear such things non-instrumentally better than the world in which we instead fear that which poses no danger to us—at least, not in terms of justice, and not other things being equal. Admittedly, it would be *instrumentally* better for us to fear what’s dangerous rather than what’s harmless if this would lead us to avoid what’s dangerous rather than what’s harmless. But if other things are equal, then there would be no such instrumental benefit. And, in that case, it would be no better for us to fear the one rather than the other—at least, not from the standpoint of *justice*.

Now, admittedly, justice can be conceived of more or less broadly. Some conceive of it so broadly that it’s indistinguishable from rightness. Others conceive of it so narrowly that they believe that justice concerns only those claims and duties that are rightfully enforced by the state. I, however, take justice to lie somewhere in between. As I conceive of it, justice concerns what we *owe* to each other. Of course, we may have duties that are not owed to anyone, such as, perhaps, the duty to maximize the impersonal good. This duty, then, is a matter of rightness but not justice. And I believe that we have duties to each other that are not rightly enforced by the state, such as the duty to express our gratitude to someone who has done us a kindness. This duty *is* a matter of justice, but it’s not one that the state can rightly enforce. So, justice, as I’ll conceive of it here, concerns all and only our *directed duties*, duties that are owed to specific people who will be wronged if they are violated.

So, whereas those who pose a danger to you merit your fear in only the truth-implicating sense, those who have been gracious to you merit your gratitude in both the truth-implicating sense *and* the justice-implicating sense. They merit your gratitude in the truth-implicating sense, for your gratitude represents them accurately as having been gracious to you. Importantly, though, your gratitude toward someone who has been gracious to you is not only accurate in its appraisal of them; it’s also owed to them. This is why it’s not enough for you merely to insincerely thank them, even if you can convincingly come off as sincere. Your thanks must actually be sincere because what you *owe* them is genuine gratitude, not just some pretense of it. And, so, it seems that the world in which you are grateful to someone who has been gracious to you is, other things being equal, more just and, consequently, non-instrumentally better than the world in which you are instead grateful to someone who hasn’t been gracious to you. Thus, the gracious merit our gratitude in both the justice-implicating sense and the truth-implicating sense. And, so, gratitude for graciousness is both fitting *and* deserved.

Given these connections among desert, justice, and non-instrumental goodness, if we want to determine whether the blameworthy deserve to feel guilty, we must ask whether the world in which they feel guilt seems, other things being equal, more just and, consequently, non-instrumentally better than the world in which *the non-blameworthy feel guilt.* The problem, though, is that almost everyone in the literature has been asking a different question: whether the world in which the blameworthy feel guilt seems, other things being equal, more just and, consequently, non-instrumentally better than the world in which *the blameworthy don’t feel guilt*.[[12]](#footnote-12) But this question isn’t probative with respect to whether the blameworthy deserve to feel guilt. I’ll explain why in a moment, but first I need to lay out what the relevant possible cross-world comparisons might be. And, to do that, it will be helpful to have a concrete example to discuss.

Imagine, then, that there are two people: Blane (the blameworthy) and Inocencia (the innocent). Each accidentally kills a pedestrian because their car’s brakes fail. Inocencia is, however, innocent of any wrongdoing. In her case, the brakes’ failure was what some insurance policies call “an unpreventable act of God” in that it was due to some freak and undetectable imperfection in the metallic matrix of the brake rotor. Blane, however, was negligent. He knew that his brakes needed to be fixed and that, if he didn’t fix them, they could fail at any time. Yet he freely and knowingly chose to put off fixing them, as he was just too lazy. Thus, whereas Blane is blameworthy for the death of a pedestrian, Inocencia isn’t.

Now, there are at least three possible worlds that might be worthy of comparison. Assume that everything apart from who, if anyone, experiences feelings of guilt is the same. Thus, regardless of which, if either, of Blane or Inocencia experiences guilt at present, their cares, concerns, desires, actions, relationships, dispositions, character traits, etc. will, going forward, be exactly the same. And the consequences for them and for others will be exactly the same. Thus, an agent’s feeling guilt will not, in any of these three possible worlds, result in some instrumental goodness, such as the agent’s reformation. Here, then, are the three worlds:

1. The Blane-Feels-Guilty World: Only Blane feels guilt for having killed a pedestrian.
2. The No-One-Feels-Guilty World: Neither Blane nor Inocencia feels guilt for having killed a pedestrian.
3. The Inocencia-Feels-Guilty World: Only Inocencia feels guilt for having killed a pedestrian.

If we want to assess whether Blane deserves to feel guilt (and thereby assess whether Deserved Guilt is true), we need to compare the non-instrumental value of the Blane-Feels-Guilty World with the non-instrumental value of *the Inocencia-Feels-Guilty World*. Yet, those in the literature have almost always insisted instead on comparing the non-instrumental value of the Blane-Feels-Guilty World with the non-instrumental value of *the No-One-Feels-Guilty World*.[[13]](#footnote-13) But this is a mistake. For it’s entirely possible for the Blane-Feels-Guilty World to be non-instrumentally worse (or, at least, no better) than the No-One-Feels-Guilty World even if Blane deserves to feel guilt. So we can’t conclude that Blane doesn’t deserve to feel guilt just because we believe that the Blane-Feels-Guilty World is non-instrumentally worse (or, at least, no better) than the No-One-Feels-Guilty World, which is what Rachel Achs and Dana Kay Nelkin seem to suggest.[[14]](#footnote-14)

To see why, consider that although the Blane-Feels-Guilty World contains more justice than the No-One-Feels-Guilty World given that Blane gets more of what he deserves in that world (which is non-instrumentally good), the Blane-Feels-Guilty World also contains more suffering than the No-One-Feels-Guilty World given that Blane suffers more in that world (which is non-instrumentally bad).[[15]](#footnote-15) And it could be that the goodness of Blane’s getting more of what he deserves is insufficient to compensate for the badness of Blane’s suffering more. It might be, then, that although it’s good that Blane comes to fully appreciate his culpability for killing a pedestrian, it’s bad that this necessitates his suffering. In this respect feeling guilt might be like feeling grief. Consider that my grieving the loss of my mother is non-instrumentally good in that it constitutes my fully appreciating the significance of this loss, but it’s also non-instrumentally bad in that it necessitates my suffering grief’s essentially painful affect. Thus, it’s unfortunate that I must suffer in fully appreciating the significance of this loss. Likewise, Blane’s feeling guilt for having killed a pedestrian is non-instrumentally good in that it constitutes his fully appreciating his culpability, but it’s also non-instrumentally bad in that it necessitates his suffering guilt’s essentially painful affect. And just as we may think that the good in my grieving doesn’t fully compensate for the bad in my grieving, we may also think that the good in Blane’s feeling guilt doesn’t fully compensate for the bad in his feeling guilt.[[16]](#footnote-16) The point is that something can be good in some respects but bad in others. And if the bad outweighs the good, this something will be overall bad.

So, we can’t rightly come to the conclusion that Blane doesn’t deserve to feel guilt by comparing the Blane-Feels-Guilty World with the No-One-Feels-Guilty World and finding the former to be worse than the latter. For even if the Blane-Feels-Guilty World is worse than the No-One-Feels-Guilty World, this needn’t be because Blane doesn’t deserve to feel guilt. It could instead be because, although Blane deserves to feel guilt, the goodness in having him get what he deserves is outweighed by the badness in having him suffer. But we can, by contrast, rightly come to the conclusion that Blane deserves to feel guilt by comparing the Blane-Feels-Guilty World with the Inocencia-Feels-Guilty World and finding the former to be more just and, consequently, better than the latter. For if it is more just even though there isn’t any less suffering in it, then this must be because Blane deserves to feel guilt.

Strictly speaking, I shouldn’t say ‘must’, for there’s another possibility: it’s more just for Blane to feel guilt because, in having culpably done wrong, he has forfeited his right to be free of suffering. By contrast, Inocencia has not forfeited her right to be free of suffering given that she hasn’t done anything wrong.[[17]](#footnote-17) But given that Blane owes it to his victims to feel guilt (or so I’ll be arguing in section 3), I believe that the claim that Blane, but not Inocencia, deserves to feel guilt offers the simpler and, thus, better explanation for why the Blane-Feels-Guilty World is more just than the Inocencia-Feels-Guilty World. Given this claim, we can explain why the Blane-Feels-Guilty World is more just than the Inocencia-Feels-Guilty World in terms of what Blane, but not Inocencia, owes without having to make the further claim that Blane, but not Inocencia, has forfeited their right not to suffer.

Now, when I compare the Blane-Feels-Guilty World to the Inocencia-Feels-Guilty World, it’s clear to me that the former is more just and, consequently, non-instrumentally better than the latter.[[18]](#footnote-18) For it seems that if someone has to feel guilt, it’s more just that it be someone who owes it to someone to feel guilt rather than someone who doesn’t owe it to anyone to feel guilt. And a more just world is non-instrumentally better than a less just world, other things being equal. I find it telling, then, that skeptics of Deserved Guilt have instead focused on comparisons such as that between the Blane-Feels-Guilty World and the No-One-Feels-Guilty World. This suggests that they either don’t truly understand its implications or don’t want to tackle them head-on.

To illustrate, let’s consider one recent and important example. In her paper “Guilt, Grief, and the Good,” Dana Kay Nelkin asks us to imagine that someone has culpably wronged another and that you have the power of “the Look,” whereby you can, simply by giving this someone a certain look, induce them to feel guilty in the recognition of their culpable wrongdoing. And we are to imagine that they are already reformed and, so, will never do this sort of thing again. Moreover, we’re to imagine either that their relationship with the relevant others has been irreparably damaged or has already been fully repaired. Thus, we’re to imagine that inducing them to feel guilt isn’t a means to any instrumental goodness, such as the goodness of good relationships with others. Nelkin maintains that, in this case, you would not be “making a mistake, or leaving a reason on the table, so to speak, by taking a pass on inducing this painful feeling” (2019: 186).

But even if we agree with Nelkin on this point, this gives us no reason to be skeptical of Deserved Guilt.[[19]](#footnote-19) Deserved Guilt is compatible with Nelkin’s take on this case. For it could be that we have no reason at all to induce such painful feelings given the possibility that adding to the suffering in the world functions as an undercutting defeater, nullifying whatever reason-giving force there would otherwise be for making the blameworthy feel what they deserve to feel (that is, guilt). Note, then, that not only can a reason be outweighed by countervailing considerations, but it can also be disabled such that whatever support that it would otherwise provide for some action is completely neutralized. In other words, it’s possible that the fact that making the blameworthy feel guilt adds to the suffering in the world functions as what Joseph Raz (1975) calls an *exclusionary reason*.

Commendably, Nelkin, unlike most others, seems to recognize that cases such as this one lack probative value when it comes to Deserved Guilt, for she goes on to consider a different case:

Suppose, for example, that you are in a position in which you have no choice but to promote someone’s being harmed, and you can harm someone deserving of it or harm someone else. This may give you a reason to promote the deserving person getting what she deserves. In such circumstances, it is not unfair to impose harm on the deserving whereas it would be unfair to do so to the undeserving. (2019: 189–90)

Unfortunately, though, she fails to tackle this case head-on. For she never says whether the blameworthy deserve to suffer the harm of feeling guilt, and she concedes only that there “may” be a reason for you to see to it that you harm someone deserving of it rather than someone who isn’t. Admittedly, her hedging is understandable given that her purpose in the given paper isn’t to determine whether Deserved Guilt is true, but only to argue that it doesn’t gain support from certain other theses. Indeed, she admits that Deserved Guilt—at least, when combined with the view that there isn’t always a reason to ensure that people get what they deserve—“remains a thesis well worth further consideration” (2019: 190). And the fact that she recognizes that Deserved Guilt, when so combined, is well worth further consideration suggests to me that there is hope for developing some consensus concerning Deserved Guilt so long as we recognize that we must compare pairs of worlds such as the Blane-Feels-Guilty World and the Inocencia-Feels-Guilty World to determine whether it’s true.

What’s more, I think that we find support for my contention that the Blane-Feels-Guilty World is more just and, consequently, non-instrumentally better than the Inocencia-Feels-Guilty World by considering how fitting guilt differs from fitting fear. To understand the difference, it will again be helpful to have a concrete example to discuss. In this case, though, we’ll be comparing only two possible worlds. Imagine, then, that in one world you fear Ahimsa, who is harmless. (And note that ‘Ahimsa’ means ‘harmless’ in Sanskrit.) And, in the other world, you fear Bhayakara, a terrorist who poses a potentially lethal threat to you. (And note that ‘Bhayakara’ means ‘dangerous’ in Sanskrit.) Everything else is the same. Thus, in both worlds, Bhaykara exists and is a terrorist. What differs is only whether you fear Bhaykara or Ahimsa. In both worlds, then, the consequences for you and everyone else will be exactly the same. Thus, your fear will, in neither world, result in any good, such as your avoiding some harm. Here, then, are the two possible worlds:

1. The Dangerous-Person-Is-Feared World: You fear Bhayakara, and they pose a danger to you.
2. The Harmless-Person-Is-Feared World: You fear Ahimsa, and they pose no danger to you.

It seems to me that the Dangerous-Person-Is-Feared World is no better or worse than the Harmless-Person-Is-Feared World. Feeling fear is unpleasant and, thus, *prima facie* bad. What’s more, it seems that fitting fear isn’t any less non-instrumentally bad than unfitting fear, other things being equal.[[20]](#footnote-20) Yet it may seem that fitting guilt is less non-instrumentally bad than unfitting guilt, other things being equal, in virtue of the former’s being more just (or less unjust). And, so, we must ask: “What explains this difference between fitting guilt and fitting fear?” I see no more plausible explanation than this: whereas someone’s fittingly feeling guilt is an instance of someone’s having an experience that they owe it to someone to have and, so, something they deserve to have, someone’s fittingly feeling fear is neither. This and the fact that it’s non-instrumentally good, other things being equal, that justice is served by people getting what they deserve explains why fitting guilt, but not fitting fear, is non-instrumentally better than its unfitting counterpart in terms of justice. And, thus, it explains why the Blane-Feels-Guilty World is better than the Inocencia-Feels-Guilty World even though the Dangerous-Person-Is-Feared World is not better than the Harmless-Person-Is-Feared World. And, thus, it seems that we should accept that the blameworthy deserve to feel guilty for their wrongdoing but deny that those faced with some danger deserve to fear that which poses a danger to them.

 I believe, then, that we have an excellent test for whether those who have feature F deserve to have some experience E.[[21]](#footnote-21) For if they do, then the world in which those who are F experience E will, other things being equal, seem more just and, consequently, non-instrumentally better than the world in which those who are non-F experience E. And when we conduct this test, we find that those who are blameworthy deserve to experience guilt, but that those faced with some danger don’t deserve to experience fear. For whereas the world in which those faced with some danger feel fear (e.g., the Dangerous-Person-Is-Feared World) doesn’t, other things being equal, seem more just than the world in which those not faced with any danger feel fear (e.g., the Harmless-Person-Is-Feared World), the world in which the blameworthy feel guilt (e.g., the Blane-Feels-Guilty World) does seem, other things being equal, to be more just and, consequently, non-instrumentally better than the world in which the non-blameworthy feel guilt (e.g., the Inocencia-Feels-Guilty World).

**3. Justice and What the Blameworthy Owe to Those Whom They’ve Wronged**

I’ve claimed that the Blane-Feels-Guilty World is not only non-instrumentally better than the Inocencia-Feels-Guilty World but is also more just. Indeed, I’ve claimed that it’s better *because* it’s more just. But you may wonder why we should think that it’s more just. To see why, we must note that justice demands that we have certain attitudes. For instance, justice demands that those with autonomy have our respect, that those who have earned our trust have it, and that those who have graciously done us a kindness have our gratitude.[[22]](#footnote-22) This is because we owe it to them to have these attitudes. That is, we owe it to those with autonomy to respect them and their right to self-govern. We owe it to those who have earned our trust to trust them. And we owe it to those who have graciously done us a kindness to be grateful to them.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Admittedly, the idea that we can have duties to have and to form certain attitudes—e.g., certain beliefs, desires, emotions, and intentions—is contentious.[[24]](#footnote-24) For instance, some deny the existence of such duties on the grounds that we can’t voluntarily form (or refrain from forming) such attitudes and must have voluntary control over whether we do in order to have such duties. But others think (rightly, I believe) that it’s enough that we have rational or reasons-responsive control over such attitudes—see, for instance, McKenna (2012) and Portmore (2019). In any case, contemporary philosophers have increasingly come to accept that it can be unjust to have and to lack certain attitudes. For instance, Miranda Fricker (2007) has argued that it’s unjust to take another epistemic agent to be less credible as a result of one’s prejudices. Rima Basu and Mark Schroeder (2019) have argued that we can wrong one another (and, presumably, unjustly so) by virtue of what we believe about each other. And it’s just good commonsense to think that it’s unjust, say, to hate someone because of their skin color or to intend to kill an innocent bystander rather than merely foresee their death as the unintended side-effect of promoting the greater good.[[25]](#footnote-25)

In any case, these duties to have and to lack certain attitudes are directed duties and, thus, owed to specific individuals. So, if we fail to fulfill them, we will not only have done something wrong, but we will have also *wronged* *these individuals*. We know that these are directed duties because when we discover that they’ve been violated, we feel wounded. When you discover, for instance, that your best friend—who should know you better—thinks the worst of you, you feel wounded. And, consequently, you feel that she owes you an apology. As Rima Basu and Mark Schroeder point out, “the feeling of being wounded is arguably a sign of a directed wrong. If she owes an apology, it is to you, not to anyone else—again the sign of a directed wrong” (2019: 182).[[26]](#footnote-26) What’s more, because our having these attitudes is something that these individuals are entitled to, they can waive their entitlement (at least, in those instances in which the rights in question are not inalienable) and thereby release us from these obligations. Thus, when those whom we’ve wronged forgive us, it’s permissible for us to forswear feeling further guilt even if it remains fitting for us to feel this way.[[27]](#footnote-27) And the directedness of such duties is what makes our fulfilling them a matter of justice. Justice, after all, requires that we give others their due.

By contrast, we don’t owe it to those who pose a danger to us to fear them.[[28]](#footnote-28) Consequently, they’re not entitled to our fear, and we don’t wrong them by failing to fear them. And since there’s no obligation on our part, there’s nothing for them to release us from. Moreover, since there’s no injustice in our failing to fear them, there is nothing non-instrumentally bad (at least, not with regard to justice) in our so failing. So, it seems that whereas whether we trust those who have earned our trust, hate those who have a certain skin color, and respect those who are autonomous are all matters of justice, whether we fear those who pose a danger to us is merely a matter of fittingness.

 It seems, then, that guilt stands in relation to the blameworthy as trust stands in relation to those who have earned our trust rather than as fear stands in relation to those who pose a danger to us. That is, it seems that the blameworthy owe it to those whom they have culpably wronged to feel guilty just as we owe it to those who have earned our trust to trust them.[[29]](#footnote-29) And, thus, whether the blameworthy feel guilty is a matter of justice and not merely a matter of fittingness. This is because they owe it to those whom they’ve culpably wronged to (a) hold themselves accountable, (b) manifest the proper regard for those whom they’ve wronged, and (c) appreciate their culpability for, and the moral significance of, their wrongdoing. And, as I’ll argue presently, they can fulfill these obligations only by feeling guilty. Let’s take each in turn.

 It seems that the blameworthy owe it to those whom they’ve culpably wronged to hold themselves accountable. And for them to *hold* themselves accountable, it’s not enough that they merely *judge* themselves to be culpable; they must blame themselves. For, as David Shoemaker notes, “blame involves attitude adjustment (and not mere deployment of judgments)” (2013, 101). And this is why, as Gideon Rosen notes, “the wrongdoer who responds to outward blame with a sincere and cheerful promise to do better next time but without a hint of guilt or remorse palpably frustrates a desire implicit in resentment” (Rosen 2015: 83). For those who have been wronged rightly feel entitled to have those who have wronged them hold themselves accountable. And, to do that, they must blame themselves, which they can do only by feeling guilt regarding what they’ve done.

It also seems that the blameworthy owe it to those whom they’ve culpably wronged to fully appreciate their culpability for their wrongdoing as well as the moral significance of their wrongdoing. After all, it wouldn’t be fair if the victims were the only ones to fully appreciate these things. Now, for the blameworthy to fully appreciate these things, they must do more than merely come to believe that they’re culpable and that their wrongdoing has the moral significance that it does. For, in general, to fully appreciate that *p* involves more than just believing that *p*. For instance, you can come to believe that Bhayakara poses a significant danger to you on the basis of someone’s testimony. Still, you wouldn’t fully appreciate this danger unless you came to fear them and to the appropriate degree. Likewise, one can come to believe that some painting has great aesthetic value on the basis of someone’s testimony. But one doesn’t fully appreciate its great aesthetic value unless one is sufficiently awed by its beauty. And this mode of apprehension via emotion rather than mere cognition is significant in both its distinct effects and its distinct value.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Consider that you can come to believe that the person riding in the same subway car as you poses a significant danger to you without your feeling anxious or uncomfortable, without certain features of the situation (e.g., their suspicious behavior) becoming particularly salient to you while others (e.g., that you are somewhat thirsty) fade into the background, without your being motivated to fight or take flight, without your being physiologically readied to fight or take flight, etc. But you cannot come to fear this person without such effects taking hold of you. So, in fully appreciating that *p* (e.g., that this person poses a danger to you), you will incur certain effects on your psyche and physiology that go well beyond those that come with a mere change in your credences concerning certain propositions.[[31]](#footnote-31) For fully appreciating that *p* involves being affectively, motivationally, and physiologically engaged with the relevant object (e.g., the person riding in your subway car) in the appropriate ways.

Likewise, the blameworthy can come to fully appreciate their culpability as well as the moral significance of their wrongdoing only by feeling guilt and thereby incurring certain effects on their psyche and physiology. Thus, their thoughts will be directed to what they could and should have done differently (Niedenthal et al. 1994). Their attention will focus on their wrongdoing, its victims, and its ill effects. They will be motivated to seek out those whom they’ve transgressed to confess their wrongdoing, to express their guilt and remorse for it, and to try to repair their relationships with them by making amends (Baumeister et al. 1994; Greenspan 1995; Haidt 2003; and Lazarus 1991). And, when they confront them, they may very well experience certain physiological changes, such as stomach upset. What’s more, the painfulness of their appreciation will strike them as deserved. For, as Herbert Morris notes, “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).

Now, whereas you don’t owe it to Bhayakara, the terrorist, to fully appreciate the danger that they pose to you, the blameworthy do owe it to those whom they’ve wronged to fully appreciate their culpability as well as the moral significance of what they’ve done. Consequently, there is some value with respect to justice in fully appreciating your culpability for some wrongdoing but none in fully appreciating the danger that something poses to you. Of course, in both cases, the effects on your psyche and physiology that come with fully appreciating the relevant facts may have greater instrumental value than those that come merely with changing your credences about certain propositions. But, in the case of guilt but not fear, it seems that fully appreciating the relevant facts is not only instrumentally good, but also non-instrumentally good in that it’s owed and, therefore, just.

Lastly, it seems that the blameworthy owe it to those whom they’ve wronged to manifest the proper regard for those whom they’ve wronged, for their wrongful actions showed that they previously lacked such proper regard. So, to make amends, they must now come to have the proper regard that they previously lacked, and they must manifest this to those whom they wronged, if possible, by expressing their guilt and remorse (Tierney 2021). Of course, to do this they must actually feel both guilt and remorse. For they can’t *express* feelings that they don’t have. And feeling guilt and remorse when saying “sorry” is a duty just as much as feeling gratitude when saying “thank you” is. For it’s not enough merely to utter certain words. You must be sincere in doing so; otherwise, you fail to express the proper regard for them, which is something you owe it to them to have.

**4. Conclusion**

I’ve argued that the blameworthy have a directed duty to feel guilt. It’s directed in that the blameworthy owe it to those whom they’ve wronged to feel guilty about what they’ve done to them. And this is a matter of justice, for justice requires that we give others their due. And since, as a matter of justice, it’s non-instrumentally better, other things being equal, that the blameworthy rather than the non-blameworthy feel guilty, it follows that the blameworthy deserve to feel guilt. And, thus, we should accept Deserved Guilt. What’s more, we should accept Deserved Suffering, for feeling guilt is just a type of suffering: that of experiencing the unpleasantness of appreciating one’s apparent culpability. Thus, Deserved Guilt entails Deserved Suffering.

 Now, Deserved Guilt is a moderate thesis. It doesn’t imply that it’s ever non-instrumentally good to add to the amount of suffering in the world. It doesn’t imply that it’s ever overall good for the blameworthy to feel guilt—it could be that the badness of guilt’s painful affect always outweighs the goodness of having the blameworthy get what they deserve. It doesn’t imply that, other things being equal, a world in which the blameworthy suffer feelings of guilt is non-instrumentally better than a world in which they don’t. It doesn’t even imply that there is anyone who is blameworthy and who, thus, deserves to feel guilt. It implies only that, other things being equal, a world in which there are blameworthy people who suffer feelings of guilt (about the appropriate thing, to the appropriate degree, and at the appropriate times) is more just and, consequently, non-instrumentally better than a world in which non-blameworthy people suffer such feelings. And the one may be better than the other only in that it is less bad (or less unjust) than the other. The idea, then, is merely that if someone has to suffer feelings of guilt, it should be the blameworthy rather than the non-blameworthy.

Despite how moderate this thesis is, it is still very important. For it potentially has important implications concerning our ordinary accountability practices and the compatibility of freedom with determinism. If it’s true, and if we want to discover whether the sort of freedom that’s associated with our ordinary accountability practices is compatible with determinism, we’ll need to figure out whether we can ever deserve to suffer (even if only the sort of unpleasantness that’s essential to our feeling guilt) in virtue of our having been causally determined to knowingly do wrong.[[32]](#footnote-32)

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1. I’m talking about what’s often referred to as *basic desert,* which is the kind of desert that doesn’t derive from any general moral principle of the form ‘an act is wrong if and only if (and because) it has feature F’. Thus, to say that someone deserves something is to say more than just that it would be wrong for an agent to take or withhold it from them. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, for instance, Achs (2024), King (2023: 69 and 122), Macnamara (2020), Nelkin (2019), Pereboom (2015: 288), and Pereboom (2021: 50). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Admittedly, some people experience what’s known as *survivor’s guilt* when, by pure chance, they survive in a situation in which most others have perished, and yet they needn’t be culpable for any wrongdoing. But I think that we should understand survivor’s guilt either (a) as inaccurately representing surviving as something wrong that one “does” or (b) as an entirely different form of guilt that has nothing to do with blame. On the first horn, we can still understand survivor’s guilt as the unpleasant experience of appreciating one’s *apparent* culpability for having done wrong. And, on the second horn, I would just point out that given that we’re talking about what the blameworthy deserve, we should be interested in only the type of guilt that has to do with blame (call it *wrongdoer’s guilt*). On this second horn, then, survivor’s guilt is not the sort of guilt that’s at issue given that it is elicited by feelings of possessing inequitable benefits rather than feelings of responsibility for wrongdoing (see, e.g., Prinz and Nichols 2010: 134). And, in that case, we should take my use of the term ‘guilt’ as shorthand for ‘wrongdoer’s guilt’. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Rachel Achs says that “guilt is a type of pain” and that it is “about wrongdoing” (2024: 798) Andreas Brekke Carlsson says that “the pain of guilt is constitutive of feeling guilt: if it does not hurt, it is not guilt” (2017: 91). And he says that it is, in particular, “the pain of recognizing what you have done” (Ibid.). Randolph Clarke contends that we should understand guilt as a pained response to the thought that one is blameworthy (2016: 122–123). Michael McKenna says that “guilt involves a pained response…to registering one’s own blameworthiness or culpability” (2022: 154). Herbert Morris says that “feeling guilty is partly defined by its being a painful condition” (1971: 427). Dana Kay Nelkin says that “guilt feelings…are essentially harmful to those who experience them” (2022, 110). Derk Pereboom says that “guilt and regret can both be classified as basically appropriate pained responses to one’s own wrongdoing” (2022: 93). Linda Radzik claims that guilt is a form of suffering (2009: 35). And, in previous work, I’ve noted that feeling guilt involves “painfully appreciating the awful significance” of one’s wrongdoing (2022: 53). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For instance, Galen Strawson says, “as I understand it, true moral responsibility is responsibility of such a kind that, if we have it, then it *makes sense*, at least, to suppose that it could be just to punish some of us with (eternal) torment in hell and reward others with (eternal) bliss in heaven” (2008: 322). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Those who are sympathetic, if not in favor, include Carlsson (2017), Clarke (2016), Clarke and Rawling (2022), McKenna (2019), Portmore (2022), and Walen (2022). Those who are skeptical, if not opposed, include Achs (2024), King (2023), Macnamara (2020), Nelkin (2019), and Scanlon (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Achs’s citations are to “Menges, L. (manuscript). Is it good when the guilty feel guilt?” and “Scanlon, T.M. (2013). Giving desert its due. *Philosophical Explorations* 16, 101–116”—see Achs (2024: 809–10). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Here, I’m in agreement with Randolph Clarke: “recoil from it might stem at least partly from its often being confused with one or another far stronger claim” (2013: 153). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. To say that the world in which the blameworthy feel guilt is, other things being equal, non-instrumentally better (or more just) than the world in which the non-blameworthy feel guilt is not to say that the world in which the blameworthy feel guilt is non-instrumentally good (or just). After all, it may be better (or more just) only in that it is less non-instrumentally bad (or unjust). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Matt King seems to conflate these two different senses. For he suggests that we should understand “the desert in question [the sort implicated in Deserved Guilt] in terms of…being accurate in their appraisals.” That is, he thinks that we should understand the sort of desert that’s implicated in Deserved Guilt to be of the sort in which fear of a hippo is “deserved…due to its dangerousness” (King 2023: 102). But the sort of desert that’s implicated in Deserved Guilt is the sort in which retributivists believe that murderers deserve, as a matter of justice, to be punished given their wrongdoing, not the sort in which King believes that hippos “deserve” to be feared given their dangerousness. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. I’m concerned with only what’s known as *alethic-fittingness*. “Just as a belief is *true* if it accurately represents the world, an emotion is [*alethic-*]*fitting* if its representation [or appraisal] is veridical [or accurate]” (Macnamara 2020: 455). Of course, I admit that there is more to the appropriateness of an emotion than alethic-fittingness. For instance, fearing a cotton ball involves a mistake that goes well beyond the sort of mistake involved in an inaccurate appraisal—e.g., appraising the cotton ball as posing a danger to you. For your fearing it involves your affectively and motivationally engaging with it in a way that’s uncalled for. For instance, being motivated to flee from it is uncalled for. Being physiologically readied to flee from it by having a high heart rate, an elevated blood pressure, and a body pumped full of adrenaline is uncalled for. And having your anxiety focused solely on its soft fibers to the exclusion of everything else that might matter is uncalled for. And since fear necessitates such engagement, fear can be inappropriate insofar as such affective, motivational, and physiological engagement is itself inappropriate. By contrast, someone can mistakenly believe that the cotton ball poses a significant to danger to them but be left cold by this thought. They, unlike those who fear the cotton ball, are not making the further mistake of engaging with it in an inappropriate way. For more on this, see D’Arms (2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. I’ll provide evidence of this (in note 13 below) once I’ve laid out some helpful apparatus. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For instance, Michael McKenna asks whether, “all things being equal, it is a better world that this rapist sits in prison for five years for his act of rape than a world in which this same rapist causes the same harm to his victim but undergoes no harm himself” (2019: 263). Dana Kay Nelkin asks us to compare the world in which the blameworthy feel guilt with the world in which the blameworthy don’t feel guilt but, like us, “possess a syndrome of dispositions, desires, and cares similar to ours. So, when they freely and culpably act wrongly, they wish that they had not acted in that way, resolve not to act that way in the future, invest time and effort working on making the resolution meaningful, and so on” (2019: 181). She says that the world in which the blameworthy don’t feel guilt is “better for including less suffering” (2019: 182). Thus, she thinks that the Blane-Feels-Guilty World is worse than the No-One-Feels-Guilty World and that this supports her contention that the blameworthy don’t deserve to feel guilt. Randolph Clarke (2024) takes the comparison between worlds such as the Blane-Feels-Guilty World and the No-One-Feels-Guilty World to be the usual one. Rachel Achs notes that one common “strategy for arguing that guilt can be basically deserved is via ‘cross-world’ comparison,” and she identifies the relevant comparative judgment for those wishing to establish that the blameworthy deserve to feel guilt as “the intuition that worlds in which culpable wrongdoers suffer guilt are comparatively better than worlds in which they don’t and everything else is held fixed” (2024: 794fn.5). Interestingly, Neil Levy could, perhaps, be considered an exception, for he asks us to think about whether the badness of suffering “counts less in the consequentialist calculus, because it falls on a morally blameworthy agent, than it would were the agent not blameworthy” (2011: 3). But I find it implausible to think that the suffering of, say, loneliness counts as less non-instrumentally bad when it falls upon someone blameworthy than when it falls upon someone non-blameworthy. It’s only the suffering necessitated by feeling guilt that is perhaps less non-instrumentally bad when it falls upon someone blameworthy than when it falls upon someone non-blameworthy. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See my quotes of their words in the previous note. To simplify the presentation, I’ll drop the ‘or, at least, no better’ qualification from here on. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I’m assuming that it’s at least possible that deserved suffering could be just as bad as undeserved suffering qua suffering, even if not qua justice. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Recent psychological research has shown that our grief dissipates precipitously and surprisingly quickly (often in a matter of weeks or months rather than years) so that we can quickly continue to live happy and productive lives. I think that our resilience in the face of great loss is a good thing, for it seems to me that the good of grieving (i.e., the full appreciation of the loss) doesn’t adequately compensate for the bad of grieving (i.e., the suffering that’s essential to it). For references to the relevant psychological research and some interesting philosophical discussions of it, see, for instance, Marušić (2022) and Moller (2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. I thank Andreas Brekke Carlsson for pressing this worry. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. If Deserved Guilt weren’t true, we should, if anything, think that the Inocencia-Feels-Guilty World is better than the Blane-Feels-Guilty World in that it’s better for there to be less wrongdoing. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. I (2022: 62) as well as both Randolph Clarke and Piers Rawling (2022: 231) disagree. What’s more, they must disagree if they want to appeal to this putative reason in accounting for why it seems *pro tanto* morally permissible to express one’s blame of others with the intention of inducing them to feel guilt—see, for instance, Carlsson 2017 and Portmore (2022). Of course, we may not need to appeal to such a putative reason to do so, for, perhaps, the blameworthy forfeit their right not to be blamed—see Menges (2023). In any case, I think that if, in Nelkin’s case, it were you rather than another who had been wronged, then you would have a *pro tanto* reason to induce them to feel guilty for having wronged you either by giving them “the Look” or by expressing your resentment. I think that the fact that, in Nelkin’s case, the person giving “the Look” isn’t the one who has been wronged serves to undermine its probative value. For, as we’ll see below, the blameworthy owe it to those whom they’ve wronged (rather than to others) to feel guilt. Thus, the reason to induce feelings of guilt most clearly belongs to the one who has been wronged. What’s more, it seems that whether the one who was wronged has forgiven the wrongdoer can affect whether it is apt for others to blame the wrongdoer—see Priest (2016). And, in such instances, it would presumably also affect whether these others have a reason to induce feelings of guilt in the wrongdoer. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. I suppose that some may think that fitting fear is non-instrumentally better than unfitting fear because, as they see it, accurate appraisals/representations are, other things being equal, non-instrumentally better than inaccurate ones. I don’t share this intuition, but no matter. For what matters here is only whether you think that fitting fear is better than unfitting fear *in virtue of* the former’s being more just. And I can’t imagine that anyone thinks that. Now, as Dave Shoemaker has rightly pointed out to me in correspondence, fitting amusement seems to be non-instrumentally better than unfitting amusement, other things being equal. But I don’t think that this is because accurate appraisals are, in general, better than inaccurate ones. Rather, I think that this is because it’s non-instrumentally good to fully appreciate certain things. Moreover, as we’ll see in section 3, fully appreciating something can require having the relevant fitting emotions—e.g., you can’t fully appreciate a good joke without being fittingly amused by it. But note that fully appreciating something isn’t, in general, non-instrumentally good. For instance, it’s not non-instrumentally good to fully appreciate the danger that something fearsome poses to you. Fully appreciating some danger is only instrumentally good as a means to increasing the probability that you’ll avoid it or the harm that it could cause you. So, we should think that some but not all accurate appraisals are good. And we should think that, when an accurate appraisal is good, it’s good only as a means to the non-instrumental goodness of fully appreciating something that it’s non-instrumentally good to appreciate. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Strictly speaking, this test doesn’t show that those who are F *deserve* to have E. Rather, it shows only that it would be *more just* for those who are F to have E. We must then ask: “Why does the world in which those who are F have E seem more just than the world in which those who are non-F have E?” It could be because those who are F have forfeited their right to be free of E. Or it could be that those who are F deserve E. But where those who are F are the blameworthy and E are feelings of guilt, the best explanation is, as I argued above, that the blameworthy deserve to feel guilt, not that the blameworthy have forfeited their right to be free of such feelings. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Thus, those with autonomy deserve our respect, those who have earned our trust deserve our trust, and those who have graciously done us a kindness deserve our gratitude. And note that if you’ve earned my trust, then what you deserve is just that: my trust. You don’t necessarily deserve the common but inessential benefits that come with my trusting you—e.g., my willingness to loan you stuff simply because you’ve promised to return it. So, whether you deserve to be trusted depends (at least, in part) on whether you are trustworthy, but not at all on whether you’re morally responsible for being trustworthy. By contrast, whether you deserve the benefits that come with others treating you better as a result of their taking you to be trustworthy depends on whether you’re morally responsible for being trustworthy. Cf. Hieronymi (2004: 119). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Of course, just because an attitude is fitting doesn’t mean that it’s owed to anyone. We don’t owe it to the fearsome to fear them. And we don’t owe it to anyone to feel grief for the loss of a loved one; we don’t even owe it to the deceased to grieve their passing. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. It’s contentious among *philosophers*. For although there are countless plausible intuitive examples of wronging someone by having or failing to have certain attitudes, many philosophers, upon reflection, find this phenomenon puzzling in certain ways. For instance, they find it puzzling that we could have duties with respect to attitudes even though we don’t have the same sort of control over these attitudes that we have over our voluntary actions. For a response to such putative puzzles, see Basu and Schroeder (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. I’m also assuming, somewhat contentiously, that we can be entitled to others’ having or not having certain attitudes about us. Thus, I could be entitled to your believing what I’ve told you or to your not hating me because of my skin color. And, so, I believe that it would be a mistake to assume that someone can be entitled only to that which they can possess or not possess in the way that they can possess or not possess a material object, and not also in the way that someone can have or not have another’s trust or respect. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. As Basu and Schroeder point out, merely apologizing for the upstream acts that led you to form the attitude or the downstream acts that the attitude led you to perform strikes us as deeply unsatisfactory. And this suggests that what you’re owed an apology for is the attitude itself and not some upstream or downstream act. See Basu and Schroeder (2019: 182–3). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. It’s important, then, to keep the following three things distinct: (1) whether you are culpable for having performed some wrongful act in the past, (2) whether blaming yourself now for this past act by feeling guilty would be alethic-fitting, and (3) whether it is permissible for you to forgive yourself, foreswearing any further feelings of guilt, because, say, those whom you’ve wronged have forgiven you. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. This is reflected in our linguistic practice. When I did some searches on Google.com on August 08, 2023, I got no results for “owe them your fear,” but about 65,300 results for “owe them your trust,” about 9,100 results for “owe them your respect,” and about 5,060 results for “owe them your gratitude.” Admittedly, people do say such things as “they deserve to be feared,” but it appears that, when they do, they mean only that fear can be merited in the truth-implicating sense, not that it can be merited in the justice-implicating sense in which it would then be owed. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. I’m talking about only normal adult human beings here. Your pet dog may have in some sense earned your trust but that doesn’t necessarily mean that you owe it your trust. And you may have wronged a fish by harming it but that doesn’t necessarily mean that you owe it to the fish to feel guilty. Thus, there may be other conditions that must be met. It may be, for instance, that you can have a directed duty only to those beings with whom you bear some explicit or implicit contractual relationship. I do, however, believe that we can have directed duties toward those who are now deceased. So, if I promised someone that I would scatter their ashes on the ocean upon their death, then I owe it to them (the person who once was) to do so. For keeping promises to the dead seems to be part of our social contract. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Several others have also noted that beliefs and emotions are two distinct modes of apprehending various features of the world and that there is a distinctive kind of value and significance associated with the latter. See, for instance, Bartky (1990), Brady (2013), Calhoun (2003), Dillon (1997), Furtak (2018), Macnamara (2020), Pritchard (1991: ch.3), and Stocker (1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. I’ve claimed both that the blameworthy owe it to those whom they’ve wronged to fully appreciate their culpability and that, in fully appreciating this, they will incur whatever psychic and physiological effects are associated with the relevant emotion (in this case, guilt). That said, I don’t think that someone can be obligated to incur certain physiological effects. Obligations apply only to that which is directly responsive to reasons, and physiological effects are not. So, there is never an obligation to incur certain physiological effects; there is only the obligation to have or to form certain reasons-responsive attitudes, which will as a matter of fact involve (at least, when it comes to emotional attitudes) incurring certain physiological effects. More carefully, then, the blameworthy owe to those whom they’ve wronged to fully appreciate their culpability insofar as they can *by feeling guilt*. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. It’s interesting, then, that someone can deserve my trust at least partly because of their trustworthiness even if they’re not morally responsible for being trustworthy and, so, even if they were causally determined to become trustworthy—see note 22 above. If that’s correct, then, someone could perhaps deserve to feel guilty for an act that they were causally determined to perform. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)