

# Praise

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## 1. Introduction

It is a commonplace that blameworthy agents deserve blame, and praiseworthy agents deserve praise. But while blame has in recent years received considerable and illuminating philosophical discussion (e.g. Bell, 2013; Coates & Tognazzini, 2012; Fricker, 2016; Hieronymi, 2004; Mason, 2011; Menges, 2017; McKenna, 2013; Scanlon, 2008; Sher, 2008; Smith, 2007; Talbert, 2012; Wallace, 1994, 2011; Wolf, 2011), the nature and norms of praise remain relatively underanalyzed. Praise, of course, is not *wholly neglected*. In addition to the few instances of praise receiving close attention, moral responsibility theorists often provide *glosses* of praise alongside their discussions of blame. And where they don't, their treatments of blame's nature sometimes suggest corresponding views of praise. So, true though it remains that we "have a richer vocabulary of blame than of praise" (Watson, 1996, 241), in the years since Gary Watson's remark, our philosophical vocabulary of praise has made some progress. It is the aim of this article to provide a survey of this vocabulary of praise in order to bring greater clarity to the theoretical options available and the stakes involved, hopefully opening thereby avenues to further growth in this area.

One might wonder what explains—perhaps, justifies—the disparity of attention given to praise relative to blame. One factor is plausibly that theory of legal responsibility, in the form of criminal law theory, provides conceptual resources for theorizing culpability and blame, but not laudability and praise.<sup>1</sup> While this might go some way toward an *explanation*, justification it is not. Some theorists, most notably Jay Wallace (1994), maintain that moral responsibility is fundamentally about blameworthiness because our blame responses are unified in their connection to moral demands and their violation. But even if Wallace is right about the unique connection between blame and moral demand, given widespread commitment to the idea that moral responsibility is about the worthiness of blame *and praise*, why not pursue a view of moral responsibility

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<sup>1</sup> Brink (2021, 32) identifies this as a reason for focusing on blame in constructing an account of responsibility.

that includes conceptual resources beyond those elucidatory of blame?<sup>2</sup> A more general candidate explanation—which, if true, would provide some justification for the praise/blame disparity—is the possibility that blame is *more important* than praise. Elizabeth Beardsley (1970, 170) implies this in writing that, “Blame, in all its forms, has a power and poignancy for human life unparalleled by other moral concepts”. Blame, to be sure, is typically *more serious* a matter than praise. But to identify importance with seriousness is to prejudge the issue. Further, social psychological evidence suggests we are prone to a ‘negativity bias’, such that we display greater sensitivity, both in attention and memory, to negative over positive events.<sup>3</sup> To the extent that our intuitions about the relative importance of blame are expressive of this bias, a debunking explanation may be in the offing for our relative neglect of praise.

Fortunately, we needn’t come here to a conclusion concerning either the explanation of praise’s neglect or its importance relative to blame. It will suffice that praise is very important. And this can hardly be denied. Praise is interpersonally vital, contributing to the building and strengthening of our various social ties: “compared with blame, praise is relatively more directed toward building, establishing, and maintaining social relationships and affiliative alliances” (Anderson et al., 2020, 696). Praise also occupies an important educative function, saliently conveying information about the norms and values of one’s community (Delin & Baumeister, 1994, 223). The motivational value of praise is also notable: social psychological evidence suggests that, in contrast to mere rewards, specific expressions of praise positively contribute to agents’ non-instrumental motivation to pursue the praised activity (Deci, 1971, 114; Furukawa, 1982).<sup>4</sup> Additionally, when we praise another we typically imply that they are responsible for something valuable in a manner that can positively alter their self-concept (Grusec & Redler, 1980). The self-esteem or pride involved in registering one’s responsibility for things of value is plausibly a non-trivial component of a meaningful life (Wolf, 2010, 104). Praise is of course also important from the perspective of theorizing about moral

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<sup>2</sup> See Macnamara (2011); Russell (2013); Martin (2014); Telech (2020).

<sup>3</sup> See Taylor (1991); Ito et al. (1998); Rozin & Royzman (2001); Baumeister et al. (2001).

<sup>4</sup> This is not to deny that praise can have negative value for the praisee, especially when it is (perceived to be) inflated. See Farson (1963); Kanouse et al. (1981); Brummelman et al. (2017); Brummelman & Graspas (2020). Praise might also be demeaning in expressing the praiser’s holding the praisee to an incongruous standard, perhaps especially so when this is explained by stereotype or prejudice (Sie, 2022, 679). On the issue of stereotype-informed praise, and related discussion of inequities in praise, see Holroyd (2021).

responsibility and agency, since, if we're interested in the range of responses that agents may deserve for their morally significant actions, we should have an account of that which the morally praiseworthy agent is worthy of.

My focus in the following is the *nature* of praise, where the views surveyed provide responses to the question, *what type of thing is praise?* This question—'the type question'—is contrastable with further questions we might ask about praise's nature, e.g. 'what does praising a person add to judging them praiseworthy?' or 'what is the representational content of praise?' These questions are posterior to ours, as they take for granted that praise consists at least in part in judgment or some other representational attitude. While praise's nature is my focus, I provide also a brief overview of the candidate *norms* governing praise. Praise, after all, is conceptually connected to *praiseworthiness*, and as the latter is a normative concept—concerning the appropriateness of praise—it behooves us to consider the kinds of norms governing praise.

It should be clear that by "praise", I mean an *agent*-directed response, contrastable with the praise directed toward mountains, sunsets, and the like. While praise of the latter sort is roughly a mere matter of positive evaluation, the praise of interest to me is a response of giving an agent *credit* for something (e.g. an action), and as such implies viewing its target as a responsible agent.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, as my discussion is situated within discussion of our moral responsibility practices, my focus is praise of agents for *morally* praiseworthy action, rather than agent-directed praise in other normative domains (e.g. epistemic, aesthetic).

To set us on our way, it will be useful to have an example about which all plausible views of praise will agree *includes* praise. It will presumably include much more. Our task is to consider several views that, in effect, specify where it is, exactly, that the praise is to be found.

Alicia learns that Bader is struggling with his asylum application and that he cannot afford legal assistance. Experienced with refugee and immigration law, and familiar with the difficulties facing those new to a land with limited grasp of the local language, Alicia spends several hours throughout the week helping Bader with his

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<sup>5</sup> Though I focus on *actions* as the objects of praise, nothing in what follows precludes the possibility that we might be praiseworthy for non-actions, e.g. character traits, involuntary attitudes.

application and legal forms. Bader is touched by Alicia's generosity, feeling grateful in response. He is disposed to extend goodwill to Alicia, and expresses his heartfelt thanks by cooking dinner for Alicia and her partner. Bader judges Alicia's action to be expressive of her virtuous character and admires Alicia on the basis of her generous action. Alicia's colleague, Cleo, learns of Alicia's actions, and knowing how busy Alicia is with her own work, thinks highly of, and feels approbation toward, Alicia for her helping action, saying something like 'that is very kind of you' to Alicia. Unbeknownst to Alicia, her company recently established a community engagement award, which she receives (having been nominated by Cleo) in recognition of her action.

Below I consider the merits and potential drawbacks of several views of the nature of praise. The adequacy of these views can be evaluated relative to their ability to elucidate that part (or perhaps, those parts) of the example in which the praise resides.

## 2. What Praise Might Be

### 2.1 The Judgment View

On one kind of view, to praise an agent, *S*, for something,  $\varphi$ , is simply to form a certain belief or judgment about *S* on the basis of her  $\varphi$ -ing. On this kind of view—the judgment view—to praise an agent is to judge her praiseworthy. Bader will count as praising Alicia, on the judgment view, in virtue of making a certain judgment of Alicia for her action, e.g. that she performed it freely for the reasons that make it right, or perhaps that it was a manifestation of a virtue of generosity (Watson, 1996, 231; Anderson et al., 2020). Proponents of the judgment view will differ in how to specify the content of the relevant judgment, depending upon the particulars of their views of moral responsibility. What matters here is simply that the judgment view identifies praise with certain judgments, e.g. those formed by Bader and Cleo about Alicia for her action.

Michael Zimmerman (1988, 38) gives voice to a version of the judgment view in writing of praise consisting in "making a private judgment about a person." To capture the kind of judgment he has in mind, Zimmerman (1988, 38) employs several metaphors: "Praising someone may be said to constitute judging that there is a "credit" in his "ledger of life," a "positive mark" in his "report-card of life," or a luster on his "record as a

person”; that his “record” has been “burnished”; that his “moral standing” has been “enhanced.”” It bears emphasizing that this talk of ledgers and records is metaphorical; “inward praising”, as Zimmerman (1988, 38) calls it, is not analogous to “the *making* of entries in the ledger; on the contrary [it is] analogous to *judging there to be* such entries.” When Cleo judges that Alicia’s action e.g. has moral worth, or expresses a high degree of good quality of will, or [insert preferred view of the content of judgments of praiseworthiness], she will, on the judgment view, be praising Alicia.

The judgment view seems to capture the way in which praising another involves *thinking highly* of them. But, as we can think highly of another, or judge them praiseworthy, without expressing that judgment to anyone, the judgment view appears to issue the verdict that praise is at bottom a private affair. Although we might grant that praise *can* be kept private, the case of Alicia and Bader includes expressive and communicative elements that seem strong candidates for praise. The problem here is not simply that judgments aren’t *necessarily* expressed; in contrast to other attitudes, judgments do not obviously include motivational tendencies that could render the link between judgments of praiseworthiness and overt behavior non-accidental.<sup>6</sup> One might further worry whether mere judgments of praiseworthiness, even when made transparent to their targets, could account for the interpersonal significance of praise. Mere judgments aren’t obviously the kinds of things that could make sense of why we care about being praised.<sup>7</sup> A more serious objection may be that judgements of praiseworthiness are insufficient even for *private praise*. Satan and the amoralist can presumably judge Alicia to have acted praiseworthily, in the sense of taking her to have done ‘the right thing for the right reasons’, say—without thereby praising her. In reflecting on Alicia’s having placed another’s interests before her own, Satan might think something like: ‘she benevolently did the morally right thing—*what a sucker!*’<sup>8</sup> Presumably, this is not praise. A general way to put the problem is that the judgment view cannot obviously accommodate the way in which praisers are favorably disposed toward those they praise.

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<sup>6</sup> Given Humean assumptions about the contingent relation between normative judgment and motivation, this worry remains even if we construe the relevant judgment to include or entail a prescriptive component, e.g. ‘I ought to treat S in such-and-such manner’.

<sup>7</sup> But see Hieronymi (2004, 123-5).

<sup>8</sup> See Arpaly & Schroeder (2014, 160–1).

## 2.2 The Action View

The praiser's favorable disposition toward the praisee is well accounted for on the action view. On this view, to praise someone is to treat them in some beneficial manner. The everyday understanding of the word 'praise' finds intuitive support in this view. To praise another is intuitively, in some sense, *to do* something, to engage in some overt behavior. A prime candidate for the relevant kind of behavior is *linguistic behavior*. And indeed, praise is often understood to be a kind of speech act. In J.L. Austin's (1962, 151, 154) terms, in addition to issuing a positive verdict about its object, praise is a "behabitive", a piece of "social behavior"—implying the adoption of an attitude toward another.<sup>9</sup> Though other versions of the action view might be developed, here I focus on the proposal that praise is a kind of overt and social action.

While the idea that praise consists in action (of speech or otherwise) is itself silent on whether these actions are performed for their own sake or for some further end, historically, proponents of the action view have endorsed the latter thought. P.H. Nowell-Smith (1954, 301), for example, adopts an instrumentalist conception of the action view in writing that "appraising, praising, and blaming are things that men *do* and can only be understood on the assumption that they do them for a purpose and use means adapted to their purpose". Understanding praise to consist in overt action that is, as it were, *performed upon* another—and as such, productive of observable effects—proponents of the action view tend to understand praise as akin to the use of a tool, especially a tool for the production of socially desirable effects.

That praise is prototypically beneficial to the praisee is an important dimension of the idea that praise is an instrument for social regulation. While blame is often associated with unwelcome (or harmful) treatment, praise is associated with welcome (or beneficial) treatment.<sup>10</sup> On the assumptions that i) praise consists in beneficial treatment and ii) persons desire beneficial treatment, it stands to reason that the prospect of praise may motivate persons to perform act-types for which agents tend to be praised. On the action

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<sup>9</sup> While one might maintain the relevant attitude(s) to be partly constitutive of the speech act, it may be, as I assume in this section, that a speaker can succeed in performing a speech act *insincerely*, i.e. in the absence of the implied attitude(s) (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985).

<sup>10</sup> This is not to deny that e.g. "[p]raise may cause embarrassment or other forms of emotional discomfort that arise from self-attention" (Delin & Baumeister, 1994, 224). See also n. 4.

view, then, praise understandably functions prospectively as a kind of incentive—an incentive for what is, in effect, a kind of social reward. As Jack Smart (1961, 304) writes, “[t]o praise a class of actions is to encourage people to do actions of that class”. Though in our example Alicia does not help Bader for the sake of the company award, the action theorist may say that the praise she receives is nonetheless a reward, one poised to motivate others to act in a like manner. Similarly, Bader’s cooking Alicia a meal may be construed as a reward-like response encouraging further beneficence.

While the action view may capture the intuition that to praise another is to do something, and that praise characteristically benefits praisees, arguably it objectionably divorces praise from praisers’ underlying attitudes. If praise is fundamentally an action, though that action might *suggest* that the praiser has attitudes of approval, praise and attitudes of approval will be separable. This is especially so on the assumption that praise is a tool for social regulation. Consider Smart’s (1973, 49-50) claim that the praiser may need to “conceal[] his approval of an action when he thinks that the expression of such approval might have bad effects, and *perhaps even prais[e] actions of which he does not really approve*” (italics added; cf. Nowell-Smith (1954, 98)).<sup>11</sup>

While we can reward another without thinking highly (or approving) of them in some respect,<sup>12</sup> isn’t praise (whatever else it is) a way of thinking highly of another? The pre-theoretical connection between praise and giving credit would suggest so. The action view arguably gives insufficient weight to the positive attitudes that are presumably *constitutive* of praise (and not merely implied by it), undermining the availability of resources to distinguish beneficial actions like commendation and reward from praise. For this reason, the action view is susceptible to a further objection: just as one can presumably ‘harbor’ blame or blame another ‘in one’s heart’, i.e. privately, one can intuitively credit, or praise, another privately (notwithstanding the ordinary meaning of the English word, “praise”). While the judgment view accommodated this feature of

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<sup>11</sup> Though Smart also describes praise as a kind of “grading” (1961), consistent with his claims that praise is an action, I take Smartian grading to be *not* a matter of private assessment, but of *publicly assigning* a grade (akin to the judge’s raising of a scorecard at a competition). Otherwise, I do not understand how, as Smart (1961, 303) writes, the “young philosopher may feel pleasure at being praised by one of his eminent colleagues...”, or how the primary function of praise is “to *tell people what people are like*” (italics added).

<sup>12</sup> Consider the person who is entitled to a reward for returning a lost pet, though he is known to have done so *solely* for the reward on offer.

praise, to the extent that action views understand praise as *overt* behavior, they are committed to the view that praise is essentially expressed.

### 2.3 The Emotion View

On the emotion view of praise, to praise another for some action is to have some positive emotion toward the agent for that action. Following P.F. Strawson (1962), “reactive attitudes”, or interpersonal emotions, like approbation and gratitude are often identified as emotions of praise. As Coleen Macnamara (2011, 84) puts it, “when I feel gratitude when my friend does me a favor, admiration when my sister volunteers at a soup kitchen, or approval when I witness a stranger perform a small act of kindness, I am praising my friend, my sister, and the stranger.”<sup>13</sup> Social psychologists, too, sometimes refer to these kinds of attitudes as “other-praising emotions” (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). On this view, or its Strawsonian variant, Bader praises Alicia in feeling grateful to her, and Cleo praises Alicia in feeling approbation toward her. Gratitude involves positively evaluating and taking satisfaction in another’s acting well *toward oneself* (or a person with whom one identifies, e.g. one’s child<sup>14</sup>), and approbation involves positively evaluating and taking satisfaction in another’s acting well *toward a third party* (with whom one does not identify). Gratitude and approbation are on this view the positive analogues of resentment and indignation, the emotions of other-directed blame.<sup>15</sup>

Since emotions needn’t be expressed, the emotion view secures the verdict, like the judgment view, that we can praise privately. But in contrast to judging praiseworthy, feeling approbation (or gratitude) presumably involves one’s *being for*—or taking non-instrumental satisfaction in—the agent’s performance of some action. So, though we might imagine Satan *judging* Alicia morally praiseworthy, it is less obvious that we can imagine Satan feeling approbation toward Alicia for her helping Bader. Approbation seems to presuppose something like endorsement of the norm rendering Alicia’s action worthy of praise. The emotion view thus seems invulnerable to the main worry facing

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<sup>13</sup> See also Eshleman (2014, 229); Prinz (2007, 81); Rosen (2015, 68).

<sup>14</sup> See Walker (1980, 43) and Roberts (2015, 889).

<sup>15</sup> While gratitude is here understood as a positively valenced attitude, in being essentially directed to agents (*for* something, typically, an action), it is distinct from ‘propositional gratitude’ or *gratitude that* some state of affairs obtains. See Manela (2016). Calhoun (2021) draws an analogous distinction between propositional appreciation and *agential appreciation*, and proposes that the latter is a positive reactive attitude alongside gratitude.



the action view, namely its permitting cases of praise where the praiser does not really think highly of the praiseworthy agent. Since praising emotions *are* ways of thinking highly of another—with feeling—approbation or gratitude toward another will guarantee one’s thinking positively of them.<sup>16</sup>

Emotions, however, are mental states and mental states needn’t be expressed. What, then, accounts for praise’s public character? The emotion theorist has a ready reply. Emotions are widely taken to have characteristic motivational tendencies, such that the link between positive reactive attitudes and ‘positive actions’ may be far from tenuous.<sup>17</sup> Bader’s cooking a meal for Alicia may thus be a way of expressing his gratitude. This action will in an important sense be a manifestation of gratitude, and as such, itself a way of praising Alicia (Macnamara, 2015, 547; Shoemaker, 2013, 117). The emotion view thus seems capable of allowing that praise can remain unexpressed, while accommodating the insight of the action view, namely that to praise another is (often) to do so something.

But while we might often feel approbation or gratitude in praising another, are emotions like these really *necessary* for praise? Might not the person who is “something of cold fish”, to lightly repurpose Scanlon’s phrase (2013, 96), count as praising another—provided he, say, values the praiseworthy agent’s action and is disposed properly toward her—*despite* lacking positive affect toward the praiseworthy agent?<sup>18</sup> The emotion theorist will first clarify that one can count as praising another without undergoing an emotional episode at that very time; it will be true of Bader that he is grateful to Alicia, and of Cleo that she admires Alicia, even when they are not *experiencing* any positive feeling, as long as they are disposed to have the thoughts, feelings, and motivations proper to the relevant emotion (or “emotional stance” (Menges, 2017, 259)). If the opponent insists that positive feelings can be *wholly* (i.e. even dispositionally) absent in praise, the emotion-theorist may note that approbation and other positive reactive attitudes may be rather low in arousal—where arousal is “a subjective state of feeling activated or deactivated” (Feldman Barrett,

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<sup>16</sup> At least in one respect. One might feel approbation or gratitude toward another without *judging* them favorably for their action (unless one endorses the now-unpopular view that emotions are constituted in part by judgments), or indeed, despite judging them *unfavorably* for their action. That emotion can be ‘recalcitrant’ in this way is thought to count in favor of emotion views of blame (Pickard, 2013; Menges, 2017, 261). Whether emotional recalcitrance counts also in favor of the emotion view of praise, I leave to readers’ consideration.

<sup>17</sup> See Scarantino & Nielsen (2015); Scarantino (2017).

<sup>18</sup> Perhaps emotionless praise is intelligible in way emotionless *blame* isn’t (Stout, 2020, 217).

1998, 580)— such that their affective features may not be prominent in one’s overall conscious experience, yet nonetheless operative in one’s attentional and motivational tendencies.<sup>19</sup>

Another objection is that emotions like gratitude and approbation do not always seem to be forms of praise. This is especially the case with gratitude. To illustrate, imagine a version of our lead example where Alicia falsifies documents in Bader’s application such that he unduly receives preferential consideration, and that this comes to be known by Bader.<sup>20</sup> Presumably Bader would nonetheless be *grateful* to Alicia for this beneficial (but unfair) treatment. Yet, this aspect of Alicia’s helping Bader is presumably not morally praiseworthy. Indeed, in treating unfairly other asylum applicants, Alicia is intuitively blameworthy. In response, the emotion theorist may say that although Alicia is not praiseworthy for the preferential treatment of Bader, and Bader knows this, this doesn’t mean that Bader does not praise her in feeling gratitude. Indeed, it may be a virtue of the emotion view that it can account for blaming and praising *against one’s judgment*. A problem with this reply is that Bader’s gratitude does not seem to be a standard case of recalcitrant emotion, i.e. having an emotion despite judging the target to *not* merit that response. While, say, fear of the ant seems patently *unfitting*, it is less clear that Bader will, even upon reflection, deem his gratitude unfitting.<sup>21</sup>

These gratitude-related difficulties, however, might not be difficulties for the emotion view *itself*, but rather for its dominant, Strawsonian, variant. An emotion view might reject the idea that gratitude is a praise-manifesting emotion, without rejecting that praise consists in certain other positive emotions.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.4 Conative-Alternation Views

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<sup>19</sup> We have evidence for thinking that low-level emotional responses are ubiquitous in, and integral to, practical reasoning, such that a genuine “cold fish” would likely be deliberately and interpersonally inept. See Damasio (1994).

<sup>20</sup> I borrow the shape of this example from Roberts (2013, 124).

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps Alicia is praiseworthy for one aspect of her action and blameworthy for another. If so, the emotion theorist can grant that Bader’s gratitude is fitting *to the extent that* it tracks the praiseworthiness of Alicia’s action. But, as Alicia is blameworthy for a different aspect of the action, it will also be fitting for Bader to also have a blame-manifesting attitude directed to Alicia. See Pummer (2021, 701) for discussion of aspects of praise- and blame-worthiness.

<sup>22</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

Having surveyed several attitudes as candidates for praise, it is natural to consider whether a different kind of attitude, namely desire, or something in the ballpark, might be fit for the task. Conative attitudes, e.g. intention, desire, are those most closely associated with the will. While it would be odd to hold that praise *consists in* a certain kind of desire or intention, perhaps praise consists in, or features centrally, *the alternation* of some such attitude. The two versions of the view here canvassed lack explicit adherents, but are inspired by George Sher's and T.M. Scanlon's views of blame, respectively. Unifiable under the heading 'Conative-Alteration Views', the differences between them are sufficiently large to merit separate consideration.

#### 2.41 The Desire-satisfaction view

On what we may call the desire-satisfaction view of praise, for S to praise P for some action  $\phi$  is for a certain kind of non-instrumental desire of S's to be subjectively satisfied by (S's perception of) P's  $\phi$ -ing.<sup>23</sup> We want persons to act in various ways (e.g. kindly, courageously), and when we take someone to have so acted, our standing desire is subjectively satisfied. The emphasis on *subjective* satisfaction is important, for praise does not require that the world actually accord with one's desire, only that one takes (e.g. believes) it to so accord.

This view would posit that Cleo has a standing non-instrumental desire that, say, persons with the requisite resources help those in need, and that Cleo's praise of Alicia consists in the subjective satisfaction of this desire. Since Alicia *does in fact* help Bader under the right conditions, Cleo's desire is also objectively satisfied, but it is in virtue of Cleo's taking this to be the case (regardless of whether she is correct) that her desire is subjectively satisfied. The desire-satisfaction view is poised to account for praise's being positively valenced; it typically *feels good* when our desires are subjectively satisfied. Adapting a sentence from Sher (2006, 104): "It is no accident that the word "[satisfaction]" designates both the [fulfillment] of a desire and a type of [positive] feeling; for feelings of [satisfaction] very often accompany [satisfied] desires." Further, as our scope is restricted to desires concerning *others' agency*, it will be true of the relevant desires that they are satisfied by, and about, an agent's acting well. Understandably then, the pleasure felt in

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<sup>23</sup> To desire X non-instrumentally is to desire X *at least in part* for its own sake. On non-instrumental (or, 'intrinsic') desires, see Arpaly & Schroeder (2014).

the desire's satisfaction— to the extent that this is pleasurable— will be directed toward an agent.<sup>24</sup> So, though the desire-satisfaction theorist takes positive attitudes (and actions) to be inessential to praise, they are arguably in a position to explain why these are characteristic *expressions* of praise. Owing to what it is to have a standing non-instrumental desire satisfied by another, the affective and behavioral dispositions associated with praise may be explained by the desire's being (subjectively) satisfied.<sup>25</sup>

#### 2.42 The Relationship-Enhancement view

On another kind of conative-alteration view, it is the revision of one's *intentions* concerning praiseworthy agents that is central to praise. To see why this might be called the relationship-enhancement view, note that Scanlon (2008; 2013) presents an account of blame based upon the reasons generated by one's involvement in relationships, where a relationship is just "a set of intentions and expectations about our actions and attitudes toward one another that are justified by certain facts about us" (Scanlon, 2013, 86). On Scanlon's view, to blame some person P is to modify one's intentions regarding, and expectations of, P in light of one's taking P to have acted blameworthy (i.e. in a way that displays attitudes that impair one's relation with some person). The relevant modifications here are changes in the blamer's intentions and other attitudes reflective of that impairment, e.g. the blamer's "suspending one's normal intentions to trust the friend and confide in him" (Scanlon, 2013, 88).

An analogous view of praise takes praise to reside in positive changes in one's intentions and other attitudes toward praiseworthy agents. While the modifications in the case of blame are those reflective of relationship-*impairment*, those of praise may be reflective of relationship-*enhancement*. Viewing Alicia to have acted in a way that strengthens her relationship with Bader, Bader might adjust his intentions in response to

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<sup>24</sup> While we could formulate a *hedonic* version of the desire-satisfaction view of praise— on which subjective desire-satisfaction counts as praise only if it is pleasurable (or gives rise to pleasure)— the view canvassed here identifies praise simply with the specified kind of subjective desire-satisfaction, not pleasant subjective desire-satisfaction. (For theorists who identify subjective desire-satisfaction with pleasure (Heathwood, 2006) or take desire-satisfaction to be essentially pleasurable, there will be no real difference between the view here canvassed and its hedonic variant.) I thank an anonymous reviewer for prompting me to clarify this issue.

<sup>25</sup> I draw here on corresponding ideas developed by Sher (2006, 104-6) concerning desire-frustration and blame. To be clear, Sher does not propose a conative-alteration account of praise. His claim that "praise is always overtly bestowed" (*ibid*, 71) suggests he would not sign onto it.

the significance for him of her action. Indeed, Bader's cooking Alicia dinner (as well as his being newly disposed with good will toward her, generally) might be understood as expressions of such changes in intention.<sup>26</sup>

A possible objection to conative-alteration views is that they describe a type of praise that can be accepted by skeptics about free will and moral responsibility (Pereboom, 2014, 127), which might suggest that they exclude something essential to our responsibility practices. Conative-alteration views of blame are sometimes charged with "sanitizing" blame, chiefly in leaving hostile attitudes and actions out of the analysis (Wallace, 2011; Wolf, 2011). Though praise is of course non-hostile, one might take it to be characterized by a kind of warmth, amicability, and beneficial treatment that is similarly left out of the analysis on conative-alteration views. To see that the desire-satisfaction view, for example, may be charged with omitting something essential to praise, consider its verdict concerning Delia, who is ill-disposed toward Alicia—perhaps they had an acrimonious falling-out, leaving Delia bitter toward Alicia—but who has an intrinsic desire to the effect that persons help others when doing so would not be unduly burdensome, which desire is subjectively satisfied upon Delia's learning of Alicia's action.<sup>27</sup> Although Delia seems to take Alicia to *be praiseworthy*, and furthermore presumably takes the world to be a better place owing to Alicia's generous action, given her bitter disposition toward Alicia, it is not obvious that Delia counts as praising Alicia. If the desire-satisfaction view is prone to generating false-positives, the relationship-enhancement view might suffer from proneness to false-negatives, for we seem to regularly praise persons with whom we are not properly related (e.g. strangers) such that our praise of them can be easily understood to consist in the modification of previously existing intentions or other conative attitudes.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.5 Communicative (and other Functional) Views

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<sup>26</sup> Scanlon (2013, 96–99) presents a picture of *gratitude* that is much like the relationship-enhancement view of praise here presented, though Scanlon (2013, 86, 95) himself maintains that praise is a "purely evaluative notion".

<sup>27</sup> This is the inverse of an objection raised by Smith (2012, 35).

<sup>28</sup> See Sher (2013) for this kind of objection to Scanlon's relationship-impairment view of blame.

The above views answer the type-question by identifying praise with a determinate feature of our psychologies (broadly construed to include action). While this is perhaps a natural way to proceed, praise might instead to be identified by what it *does*. That is, praise might be a functional type, such that various kinds of things (emotions, judgments, actions, etc.) might count as instances of praise as long as they play a certain functional role. While there are numerous functions with which praise might be identified, the proposal that praise is *communicative*—that it has the function of communicating something—has received particular attention. Accordingly, it will be our focus.

Our responses of praise and blame are sometimes characterized as contributions to a moral conversation (McKenna, 2012). On this type of view, praise is not only paradigmatically expressed (as is, say the feeling of coldness, in shivering) but communicated. Praise can be thought of as a kind of message—something that *aims* to communicate something to its target, and as successful when it secures the right kind of communicative uptake from its target (Watson, 1987; Shoemaker 2015, 104-113); it is a form of address that, as it were, comes with an “implicit RSVP” (Darwall, 2006, 145). This is not to say that praise is *necessarily* communicated. Praise that is private, or otherwise fails to reach its addressee, will fail to fulfil its constitutive function, but may nonetheless be understood to be a *communicative entity* addressed to its target, e.g. in a manner analogous to the way an unsent email is addressed to its target recipient (Macnamara, 2015, 555).

Supposing praise to have a constitutive communicative function, what might this function be? According to Telech (2021), praise communicates a kind of invitation; it invites the praisee to take credit for her action by jointly valuing, with the praiser, what the praiseworthy action meant for the praiser. As this joint valuing is initiated by the praiser and framed in terms of the features of the act salient to him, there is a sense in which the praiser *hosts* the joint valuing that praise achieves when given uptake.<sup>29</sup> In contrast to the kind of moral address standardly taken to characterize blame—namely, demand, which (when valid) provides imperatival reasons for compliance (e.g. to

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<sup>29</sup> That praise seeks acceptance culminating in joint valuing is maintained also by Elinor Mason (2019, 108), though Mason claims both that that praise issues demands and requests: “Praise is not simply admiration, it implicitly demands acceptance” (108); “Praise does make a demand” (109); “When I praise someone, I ask that she accept my praise” (107); “Thus the implicit request for acceptance of praise is non-trivial” (108).)

acknowledge wrongdoing, offer redress)—praise’s invitations give their addressees discretionary reasons in search of their target’s acceptance.

The communicative view might appear susceptible to an obvious objection: we often praise others without intending to invite them to anything. But this objection presupposes something that the communicative view rejects (or can reject), namely the identification of the communicative aim of praise with the *praiser’s* aim.<sup>30</sup> Next, while self-praise has been largely put aside thus far, the communicative view may have particular difficulty accommodating the phenomenon. After all, the aim of securing communicative uptake seems to presuppose that the addressor and addressee are distinct agents.<sup>31</sup> Telech (2021) restricts the scope of his invitational account to other-directed praise, but if it is a desideratum of a view of praise that it treats symmetrically self- and other-praise, this restriction will mark a shortcoming. On the other hand, given the relationship-building character of praise (see Anderson et al., 2020, 695)—which, unless we stretch the meaning of relationship to include one’s self-relation—perhaps we should welcome an asymmetrical view of self- and other-praise.<sup>32</sup> Alternatively, taking a lead from theorists who maintain that self-directed *demands* are operative, too, in self-blame (e.g. Darwall 2006, 74), the invitational view might be extended to self-directed praise.

There are of course other candidate functions with which we might identify praise. The constitutive function of praise might be to *celebrate* the praisee’s action, where this may be expressive one’s endorsement of the value of the action, irrespective of possible uptake from the target.<sup>33</sup> Or perhaps praise is to be identified with the function of signaling the praiser’s commitment to certain standards.<sup>34</sup> Importantly, and anticipating the next section, one might hold that it’s *essential* to praise that it has some (e.g.

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<sup>30</sup> The distinction between the aim of praise and the praiser’s aim is analogous to the distinction between the internal aim of a speech act and the speaker’s aim. See Searle & Vanderveken (1985, 14) via Macnamara (2013, 896). But see Fricker (2016, 172) and Mason (2019, 108).

<sup>31</sup> The relationship-enhancement view faces a similar difficulty, though the idea that one’s relationship with oneself might be enhanced (where that might include an enhanced degree of self-trust) is arguably less mysterious than the idea of self-*communication*. Of the other views canvassed, three can treat other- and self-praise symmetrically with relative ease: the judgment view; the emotion view; the desire-satisfaction view.

<sup>32</sup> See Nelkin (2022) on a different kind of asymmetry between self- and other-blame that might apply, too, to praise, and the essays collected in Carlsson (2022) more generally for discussion germane to thinking about self-praise.

<sup>33</sup> This kind of view may be thought of as the positive analogue of views on which blame is understood as *protest*. See Talbert (2012); Smith (2013); Hieronymi (2001); Pereboom (2017).

<sup>34</sup> Shoemaker & Vargas (2021) propose a signaling theory of blame.

communicative, celebratory, signaling) function, without identifying praise with that function.

### 3. Complexity and Pluralism

We've proceeded under the assumption that there is a single correct answer to the question, 'what is praise?' But maybe praise is more than one thing. There are two (non-exclusive) senses in which this could be meant. First, praise might be a *complex phenomenon*, such that some combination of the above views will furnish an adequate account of praise. For example, praise might be a composite consisting of an action and a positive judgment (that is expressed in the action). Or, perhaps praise is essentially a communicative phenomenon that is realized, at least in humans, in the manifestation of positive emotions.<sup>35</sup> And so on. But even if we ultimately settle on a view of praise that combines elements from the above proposals, there are good methodological reasons to proceed as we did. For, informed combination requires a clear view of the elements to be combined.

Next, praise might be 'more than one thing' in that there are *multiple kinds of praise*. If so, we should be pluralists about praise. This idea may be particularly attractive if we think there are multiple kinds of moral responsibility. Following Watson, two kinds of responsibility are standardly distinguished—attributability and accountability<sup>36</sup>—and it may be that the praise directed toward agents who are praiseworthy in the attributability sense is of a different kind from the praise directed toward agents who are praiseworthy in the accountability sense. According to Watson (1996), the former involves a positive appraisal or judgment of an agent, while the latter is an affectively charged phenomenon that affects its target's interests.<sup>37</sup> Praise pluralism, however, does not depend upon responsibility pluralism. It might be that, even within accountability responsibility (or some other type of responsibility), praise is disunified, such that there are multiple kinds

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<sup>35</sup> Indeed, following Watson (1996), there is significant overlap between those who take praise to consist in reactive emotions (and their expression), and those who take praise to be communicative in nature (e.g. Darwall, 2006; Shoemaker, 2015; Macnamara, 2013; Telech, 2021). That 'other-praising emotions' are characterized by relationship-building motivations (Frederickson, 1998; Algoe & Haidt, 2009) perhaps bolsters the view that praise is both emotion-based and communicative.

<sup>36</sup> But see Scanlon (1998; 2008), Smith (2005), and Talbert (2012).

<sup>37</sup> Shoemaker (2015) understands attributability and accountability in importantly different ways from Watson, and identifies answerability as a further type of responsibility still.



of accountability praise; perhaps, for instance, some kinds of accountability praise are constituted by positive emotions, others by relationship-enhancement, etc.<sup>38</sup>

Having discussed several possible accounts of praise's nature, we turn now, more cursorily, to its norms.

## 4. Norms of Praise

Praise is evaluable relative to multiple standards of appropriateness. Praise, in other words, is norm-governed. This section provides an overview of the (candidate) norms of praise.

### 4.1 Merit

First, praise is governed by a norm of merit.<sup>39</sup> For praise to be appropriate, the praisee must be *praiseworthy*, i.e. she must be worthy of, or merit, praise.<sup>40</sup> Alicia, we saw, merits praise, and she merits praise in virtue of having generously helped Bader. What, though, does this “meriting” come to? Above, I occasionally referred to praiseworthiness in terms of praise being “deserved”, and occasionally in terms of praise being “fitting”. These might not come to the same thing. Desert is sometimes understood to be a moral relation, such that it, if an agent deserves some response, it would be *just* for them to receive it and *unjust* for them to be deprived of it. If we take praise to be reward-like, or to benefit the praisee, we may be attracted to the view that to be praiseworthy is to merit praise in the sense of being deserving praise. Alternatively, praiseworthiness might be analyzed in terms of fittingness, understood as a non-moral normative relation. Praise's being merited

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<sup>38</sup> A paradigm-based methodology might be especially suited to provide a view of praise as an internally diverse yet coherent practice. See McKenna (2012) and Fricker (2016) for this kind of approach to blame. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for the point that one might accept pluralism about praise even holding fixed the type of responsibility.

<sup>39</sup> While almost universally accepted in the current debate (including by those who take (backward-looking) responses of praise and blame to be instrumentally justified, either at the level of the practice (e.g. Vargas, 2013) or at the level of individual responses (e.g. McGeer, 2019)), a certain kind of consequentialist maintains that to be praiseworthy for X is to be susceptible to encouragement to perform further X-like actions (e.g. Schlick, 1939; Nowell-Smith, 1954). For helpful overview, see Vargas (2022).

<sup>40</sup> This is not to deny that we might have conclusive state-given reasons (or reasons ‘the wrong kind’) to praise the unmeriting, e.g. because failing to praise would have disastrous consequences. The point is that, even if justified given the balance of reasons, praise of this sort would remain inappropriate in one key respect, specifically: it would be unmerited.

by A's  $\varphi$ -ing might, for example, be a matter of praise being a response that *correctly appraises* A's  $\varphi$ -ing, or its being non-instrumentally good to praise A for  $\varphi$ -ing.<sup>41</sup> If there are multiple kinds of praise, it may be that one kind is (or some kinds are) governed by a norm of merit-as-fittingness and another (or others) by merit-as-desert.

Some views of desert are better suited to understanding blame than praise. Consider the view that to deserve some response is for it to be *fair* that one receives it. While it may be that to blame the blameless is to treat her unfairly, we presumably do not treat unfairly the undeserving *by* praising her (Nelkin, 2011; King, 2014).<sup>42</sup> Theories that understand deserved blame in terms of the *permissibility* to blame are arguably also poorly positioned to extend to praiseworthiness,<sup>43</sup> for it is difficult to accept that to be praiseworthy is to be such that one is thereby permissibly praised. After all, though there may be *something* objectionable about praising the non-praiseworthy, it does not seem that doing so is impermissible.

Once we have settled on what praise's norm of merit comes to, a further question asks: under what conditions is praise merited? While this question will be answered partly by responding to the more general question concerning the conditions under which one is morally responsible for some action—e.g. given satisfaction of the relevant control (/ free will) and epistemic conditions—some theorists take praise and blame to be asymmetrical here. It has been argued that while the ability to do otherwise (than act culpably) is required for blame to be merited, the ability to do otherwise (than act laudably) is *unrequired* for praise to be merited (Wolf, 1980; Nelkin, 2011). Another important question concerns the moral status an action must have in order for one to be praiseworthy for its performance. Perhaps the action must *exceed* what one is obligated or normatively expected to do (e.g. Darwall, 2006, 73; McKenna, 2012, 8, 38). But there are

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<sup>41</sup> For an overview of fittingness, see Howard (2018). For the influential idea that the praiseworthiness (and blameworthiness) at issue in the traditional debate between compatibilists and incompatibilists implies "basic desert", see Pereboom (2001; 2014), and on the relation of fittingness to desert, King (2012), Clarke (2013; 2016), Nelkin (2016), Carlsson (2017) and Macnamara (2020). For extensive discussion of various kinds of desert theses, see McKenna (2012, ch.7; 2019).

<sup>42</sup> But see Stout (2020, 220). I turn below to worries of comparative fairness.

<sup>43</sup> This worry seems to apply equally to desert theses that understand desert *exclusively* in the deontic terms of permissibility, as well as those that ground this permissibility in an axiological claim (e.g. that it's non-instrumentally good for culpable agents to be harmed via blame) (McKenna, 2012, 172). For a positive desert thesis better poised to apply to praise, see McKenna's (2019) more recent view, according to which axiological considerations ground *favoring reasons* to blame. See also Nelkin (2016, 185).

intuitively cases in which is one praiseworthy though the action one performed was obligatory (Driver, 1992, 290; Martin, 2014, 127; Massoud, 2016; Stout, 2020, 216; Telech, 2020, 931), e.g. one's keeping a difficult-to-keep promise. Perhaps, then, obligatoriness is the threshold an action must meet to be potentially praiseworthy (Montminy, 2022). But some theorists hold that one can be praiseworthy even for acts that are *impermissible*, either 'merely' objectively (Zimmerman 1988; Haji, 1997), or (also) by the agent's own lights (Pummer, 2020). Perhaps this disagreement is revelatory of the fact that, regardless of what, if any, particular deontic status (e.g. supererogatory, required, permissible), an action must have for one to be potentially praiseworthy for its performance, it is the action's *evaluative* status that is relevant to merited praise. Macnamara (2011, 93) maintains this, writing that "it is the good in the action and not its deontic status that we are responding to with praise. Broadly put, my claim is that praise is always a response to the positive evaluative significance of an action." (cf. Eshleman, 2014, 228; Martin, 2014, 126-136).

In addition to agents' abilities and actions' moral statuses, praise and blame are plausibly asymmetrical regarding motivation: while it is intuitively sufficient that one is *aware* of the moral wrongness/badness of an act (or its foreseeable consequences) for one to be potentially blameworthy for it, praiseworthiness seems to require not only that one is aware of, but *motivated by*, the act's (perceived) moral rightness/goodness (D'Arcy, 1963, 160; Arpaly, 2003, 79, 84; Zimmerman 1988, 50; Haji, 1998, 175).<sup>44</sup> While culpability is compatible with indifference concerning one's wrongdoing, praiseworthiness seems to require doing the 'right thing *for the right reasons*'.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, given the scalar nature of praiseworthiness, the norm of merit arguably includes considerations concerning proportionality. That is, praiseworthiness presumably comes in degrees, such that two agents may both be praiseworthy, yet one is more praiseworthy than the other, i.e. meriting a greater degree of praise.<sup>46</sup> If so, though

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<sup>44</sup> See Knobe (2003) for a related asymmetry in intention-attributions for harmful and beneficial actions, and Anderson et al. (2020, 697) for an overview of studies on asymmetries in judgments of praise and blame.

<sup>45</sup> It is a further question whether praiseworthiness requires being motivated by rightness *de re* (Arpaly, 2003; Markovits, 2010; Arpaly & Schroeder, 2014), or whether motivation by rightness *de dicto* can be praiseworthy too (Johnson King, 2020).

<sup>46</sup> One's degree of praiseworthiness might be determined by myriad factors, e.g. degree of moral concern/commitment to morality (Arpaly, 2003, 84; Smith, 1991); difficulty (Nelkin, 2016b; Coates & Swenson, 2013); the quality of one's reason for action (Tierney, 2019). The evaluative

an agent might be praised *and* meriting praise, in being excessive or insufficient, one's praise of them might nonetheless be inapt with respect to the norm of merit.

## 4.2 Epistemic Norm

Even if some agent is praiseworthy, and so praise would be appropriate *in being merited*, one's praise might nonetheless be inappropriate if one is not justified in taking them to be praiseworthy. That is—and even if the evidentiary threshold for justified praise is lower than that for justified blame (Rosen, 2004; Vilhauer, 2015)—praise is intuitively governed by an epistemic norm. Building upon Justin Coates's (2016) discussion of an epistemic norm of blame, we can provide the following general characterization of the EPISTEMIC NORM OF PRAISE [ENP]:

It is inappropriate (absent special justification) for A to praise B for  $\phi$ -ing unless it is reasonable for A to believe that B is praiseworthy for  $\phi$ -ing, and A's praise of B is based on that which makes this belief reasonable.<sup>47</sup>

Though Alan, suppose, is praiseworthy for some courageous act (and so, merits praise), if I lack sufficient reason to believe that he performed a deed for which he is praiseworthy, intuitively I do not bear the right epistemic relation to the act to praise Alan. If I take Alan to be praiseworthy on the basis of irrelevant or insufficient evidence, or on the basis of an unreliable or poorly functioning belief-forming mechanism [or...(*insert your preferred defeating conditions for 'A's reasonably believing that B is praiseworthy for  $\phi$ -ing'*)] then I might fail to satisfy ENP, and so, violate the epistemic norm of praise.<sup>48</sup> While praisers who ignore ENP are liable to mislead others, and so will be criticizable on these grounds, the

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and deontic qualities of the action presumably also matter here. For instance, even if one can be praiseworthy for actions that are required, other things being equal, one might be more praiseworthy for supererogatory acts. (This is compatible with its being the case that, owing to their respective axiological features, some obligatory actions are more praiseworthy than certain supererogatory actions, as Driver (1992, 290) maintains.) More controversially, the gravity of the unintended consequences of one's rightdoing might render one more praiseworthy than she might otherwise be, i.e. if resultant moral luck exists.

<sup>47</sup> I owe this point about basing to Hannah Tierney.

<sup>48</sup> It may be that the epistemic standard in this context is knowledge. For the view that blame is governed by a knowledge norm, see Kelp (2020). But see Enoch & Spectre (2021, sec. 3).

objectionableness of their praise arguably has more to do with the disregard it reveals of the value of meriting praise.<sup>49</sup>

ENP does not state that the praiser must *in fact* believe B to be praiseworthy. If, say, the emotion view is correct, one might feel approbation or gratitude prior to believing or judging that the target of this attitude is praiseworthy. But ENP may be satisfied as long as the praiser possesses (and praises on the basis of) the evidence requisite to justify the belief implied in construing B as praiseworthy.

Additionally, satisfaction of ENP requires that my evidence of Alan's praiseworthiness and my praise of him are suitably related, i.e. that the latter be explained by the former. It is not enough that I merely possess the relevant evidence. The reasonableness of my praise depends on my praise being *based on*—and so, expressive of— that which makes reasonable believing that Alan acted praiseworthily.

### 4.3 Standing

Though a relatively neglected idea, it may be that praise is governed also by a norm of standing, as blame is thought to be (e.g. Wertheimer, 1998; Smith, 2007; Wallace, 2010). Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen (2022) argues that *self-praise* is governed by a norm of standing, where self-praise is understood as speech act that directs another person to respond with their own praise of the self-praiser. When the self-praiser is someone who fails to praise others for relevantly similar actions, the addressee may be permitted to ignore the directive of the self-praiser to join in on the praise. In these cases, the self-praiser lacks the standing to praise himself.

Can one lack the standing to *praise another*? This might be less intuitive, especially if we think of praise as a characteristically beneficial response. But, suppose Cleo praises Alicia for helping Bader though Cleo herself lacks commitment to the value underlying Alicia's praiseworthiness, as evinced by Cleo's regularly failing (without sufficient reason) to take on pro bono cases aiding socioeconomically underserved persons. Though merited and satisfactory of the epistemic condition, we might nevertheless think that, owing to Cleo's lack of commitment to value underlying Alicia's praiseworthy act, Cleo

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<sup>49</sup> Coates (2016, 462) proposes epistemically unjustified blame to reveal the blamer's disregard of the value of innocence.

lacks the standing to praise Alicia.<sup>50</sup> There is something *hollow* about Cleo's praise, given her lack of commitment to the relevant value, such that Alicia would understandably be put off by praise from Cleo. We need not assume Cleo's praise is *insincere*, only that it is improperly grounded in her evaluative dispositions (where these might be understood to consist in attentive, affective, and deliberative dispositions concerning the value in question). On a communicative of praise view, Cleo's lack of standing might in part be a matter of her inviting Alicia to partake in an activity of co-valuing that the Cleo is not in a position to properly host (Telech, 2021, 172). Cleo is in one respect comparable to the fair-weather fan, who partakes in celebration of a team's victories, but who supports that team only when it is succeeding. Cleo, furthermore—at least according to the communicative view—*directs* Alicia (albeit, invitationally) to participate in jointly valuing Alicia's action. Given the superficiality of Cleo's relation to the value of providing legal aid to the underserved, Alicia may be in a position to respond by disregarding or discounting this directive (Herstein, 2017; 2020).<sup>51</sup>

One might wonder whether “standing” can mean the same thing in discussions of ‘standing to praise’ and ‘standing to blame’. After all, it is often held that for would-be blamers to have the standing to blame is for them to have the *entitlement* (or authority, or right) to blame another.<sup>52</sup> Absent this entitlement, blame is impermissible. One might think the sanction-like nature of blame explains why blame can be thus impermissible. That is, blame is often understood to be a response that (characteristically, if not essentially) sets back the interests of—or harms—the blamee (Wallace, 1994; Watson, 1996; Bennett, 2002, 151–2; Rosen, 2004; McKenna, 2012, 134–41). While would-be blamers possessing the standing to blame are permitted to harm blamees (as merited by their blameworthiness), this permission is intuitively forfeited by those who lack the standing to blame. Praise, however, does not harm the praisee. If praise is interest-affecting, it

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<sup>50</sup> See Todd (2019) and Lippert-Rasmussen (2020) for the view that insufficient normative commitment is what undermines standing to blame. For Wallace (2010) and Fritz & Miller (2018), by contrast, blamers losing standing owing to their (implicit) rejection of the moral equality of persons.

<sup>51</sup> Lippert-Rasmussen (2022), too, draws on Herstein's analysis of standing, on which the norm of standing is a second-order norm permitting one to disregard a (valid) directive reason.

<sup>52</sup> On standing as i) entitlement, see Wallace (2010) and Todd (2019); ii) authority, see Friedman (2013) and Todd (2019); iii) a right, see Cohen (2006), Fritz & Miller (2018) and Todd (2019). For the idea that standing to praise might be intelligible even if praise does not require authority or entitlement, see Stout (2020, 219).

presumably *promotes* the interests of—that is, benefits—the praisee. Arguably, then, to praise another one does not require the kind of permission (or entitlement) required for blame. So, unless we are using terms equivocally, praise, it would seem, is not governed by a norm of standing.

It is not obvious, however, that only harmful responses require the relevant kind of entitlement, and so, that it is in virtue of blame's harmfulness (if it is harmful) that it is governed by a norm of standing. Consider requests. My entitlement to make a certain request of you might be undermined by my unjustifiably failing to comply with comparable requests you have previously made of me (Herstein, 2020, 1). If that's right, perhaps blame is governed by a norm of standing *not* in virtue of its harmfulness, but rather in virtue of its involving a kind of normative imposition, in *directing* the addressee to do something (e.g. acknowledge wrongdoing, offer redress). Though they do not seek compliance as do demands, requests (and arguably, invitations (Telech, 2022)) direct their addressees to do something *because so directed*. If praise involves a kind of normative imposition in directing the praisee (even if invitationally) to respond in a certain way, it may be the entitlement to make this normative imposition that is morally undermined when one lacks standing to praise.

#### 4.4 Fairness

Praise may be governed by a further, comparative norm—one of fairness.<sup>53</sup> Imagine a variant on our example, one in which Alicia and Ava *jointly* help Bader with his paperwork, contributing equally to the task, and that Bader knows all this. Suppose the merited responses here range from praise to degrees D<sub>10</sub> to D<sub>20</sub>. Praise of D<sub>9</sub> or below would be deficient and praise of D<sub>21</sub> (or above) would be excessive; anything in between would be appropriate relative to the norm of merit. Next, suppose Bader praises Alicia to D<sub>10</sub> but praises Ava to D<sub>20</sub> (and that he satisfies all aforementioned norms of praise). Though Bader's praise of each of Alicia and Ava is merited, and so, viewed in isolation his praise of Alicia is appropriate, considered *comparatively*, his praise is intuitively inappropriate. To make sense of this intuition, recourse to a comparative norm is

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<sup>53</sup> Watson (1996) and Nelkin (2008) also discuss praise and unfairness, though their topic is ultimately where unavoidable acts of rightdoing *merit* praise (such that, if the answer is 'no', it may be unfair to praise this kind of right-doer but not her counterpart, whose 'avoidance of rightdoing' is beyond her control).

necessary. Extending the proposal that blame is governed by a comparative norm of fairness (Telech & Tierney, 2019), we might say that in praising Ava to a significantly greater degree than he praises Alicia—despite there being no normative basis for differential praise—Bader’s praise is objectionably arbitrary, and so, unfair.<sup>54</sup> We arguably have an interest in receiving credit for our laudable actions. Supposing Bader’s differential praise to be expressive of his unjustifiably giving greater weight to Ava’s than Alicia’s interest in receiving credit for laudable actions, his praise of Alicia will be unfair. It will be understandable for Alicia to be hurt by Bader’s comparatively ungenerous praise. As David Miller (2007, 33) writes in a similar context, “if the person who gave me a bottle of cheap wine yesterday hands out champagne today for what is essentially the same good deed, I shall feel unappreciated and fobbed off.” Given the inherently social character of our practices of praise, we care—reasonably, it seems—about more than whether the praise we receive is individually merited. How others praise us *in comparison* to their praise of similarly praiseworthy agents matters to us too. That is, praise seems to be governed not only by a norm of merit (along with epistemic and standing norms), but also a norm of fairness. Fairness, at least, is a candidate norm of praise.

## Conclusion

The nature and norms of praise are topics deserving of sustained philosophical consideration. This much has been established by the wealth of questions left unanswered by our discussion of the ‘type question’ and our overview of the various ways praise might be assessed for appropriateness. By developing further our vocabulary of praise, we stand to acquire a richer understanding not only of responsibility, interpersonal morality, and agency, but also, more practically, of the normative communities we may hope to inhabit and the kinds of agents we might aspire to be.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See Holroyd (2021) on disparities in praise that may be explained by (and revelatory of) social inequities. For Holroyd, too, the objectionableness of this kind of praise cannot be accounted for by its flouting the norm of merit.

<sup>55</sup> For very helpful feedback on earlier versions of this paper, I’d like to thank Andreas Brekke Carlsson, Sandy Diehl, Romy Eskens, Leora Dahan Katz, Brad Kim, Kirstine la Cour, James Lewis, Max Lewis, Jennifer Morton, Daniel Ranweiler, Larisa Svirsky, Shawn Wang, and Shlomit Wygoda Cohen. Thanks also to two anonymous reviewers for this journal for extremely valuable comments.



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