

A Thesis

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Wisdom Lost in Knowledge: Theories, Theorized Blame, and Pathologies

by

Josiah L Yates

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the

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Dr. Ammon Allred, Committee Chair

Dr. Benjamin Grazzini, Committee Member

Dr. Madeline Muntersbjorn, Committee Member

Dr. Amy Thompson, Dean  
College of Graduate Studies

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An Abstract of  
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In seeking to address the problems or pathologies of blame that manifest in the world and our experience, one option is to develop theories about the nature of blame and the normative conditions. Much like our processes for ethical theories, these systems and conditions seem intended to help us be ethical – in particular, to blame correctly (i.e. only those who are blameworthy and in the right amounts, and so forth).

Within this work I seek to unpack what this might look like in detail and then to show that theories of blame are not sufficient to overcome pathological manifestations and also that there is an additional problem that needs to be addressed: theorized blame, which is a particular way of *seeing* or *being in* the encounter (as distinct from the content of the theory). The purpose then is to attempt to uncover aspects of how pathological blame manifests in the world and reorient how we go about addressing these instances.

The "Prelude," begins with some literary sketches which seek to begin illustrating ways of seeing the "world," or ways of seeing others in our blaming encounters. Following this I will briefly overview some of the relevant terms for the following discussion and attempt to lay the groundwork for the second chapter. Chapter two, "Encounters," is an in-depth analysis of the structures of what I am calling "theories of blame" and "theorized blame." Here, I will try to lay out some notions of "accounts" and "theories," generally, as well as detail what might be involved in developing an account of theory of blame. By theorized blame, I mean a way of seeing another which is theoretical in orientation; this term and others will be unpacked and clarified. The third chapter is titled "Interlude," and consists primarily of a further development of the character analyses of Rorschach and Ozymandias with particular attention to connecting the analyses to the concerns unpacked within "Encounters." The following chapter, "Pathologies," consists of an exploration of the nature of pathological instances of blame. Here, I am concerned to address the types of normative considerations that typically surround blame encounters, and then to connect this notion of pathological blame to the concerns of theories of blame and theorized blame which I have been developing. Chapter five, "Manifestations," is a continuation of the previous concerns which seeks to take the developments from "Encounters" and "Pathologies," and to make them more concrete. Given the concerns of theorized blame which I am seeking to develop, some aspects of the pathological instances with which I am concerned may

become more apparent in being shown rather than only told. Finally, this work concludes with the “Postlude,” in which I seek only to point to the possibility of non-theorized blame; that is, assuming that the concerns of pathology and blame that I have laid out are moving in the right direction of assessing the problem, my examples in the “Postlude” are intended to present the possibility of an alternative.

The purpose of this thesis is to draw attention to the significance of the moment of encounter in blaming situations and, in these moments, to indicate that theories of blame alone are insufficient for revealing or equipping us to avoid pathological instances of blame.

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# Chapter 1

## Prelude: I See a World, I Am a World

*After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now  
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors  
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,  
Guides us by vanities. Think now  
She gives when our attention is distracted  
And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions  
That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late  
What's not believed in, or is still believed,  
In memory only, reconsidered passion. Gives too soon  
Into weak hands, what's thought can be dispensed with  
Till the refusal propagates a fear. Think  
Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices  
Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues  
Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.  
These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree.*

- T. S. Eliot, from "Gerontion"

### 1.1 I See a World

I have a way of experiencing the world. I encounter phenomena (things-in-the-world, perhaps, or thingness), and I make choices and decisions. I am in many ways the sum of all that has come before me and in some ways, perhaps, more than the sum. My vision is colored and tinted. When I make a judgment,



the judgment does not exist as some objective fact about the nature of the world divorced from my perspective or the thing being judged (which is not to say the judgment isn't *true* even in an objective sense). The judgment comes from me, and is wrapped up in all that I am, and it regards its object, which might be seen in varying degrees of clarity and accuracy.

Judgments of blameworthiness and any corresponding blame exist within the confines of interpersonal experiences and rely on the way the blamer sees the world and to what extent he has seen the blameworthy. My blame often goes awry, and is in many cases problematic or complicated. I blame someone and they weren't really blameworthy or I am faced with a situation in which it's not clear to what extent someone is blameworthy.

Let us, then, seek to develop the problems that arise in blame. We will do this primarily by investigating two aspects of blame: theories (and, as we will see, accounts) of blame and another feature: what I am calling *theorized blame*. By digging into these concepts and then linking them to pathological manifestations of blame, I hope to further clarify the nature of bad blame, as well as, perhaps, to gesture toward ways out.

There are a few issues it will also be useful to clarify at the outset. First, I am taking for granted that there are pathological instances of blame (that is, situations in which blame seems to be inappropriate or used inappropriately) which we would like to avoid (though I will expound on this further in "Pathologies"). Second, given the concern of these pathological instances of

blame, what I am interested in are what happens in our blaming encounters themselves. Of concern then is not necessarily what ethical or normative guidelines are in place regarding the blameworthiness of particular acts (though these are relevant to the encounters), but rather how you and I respond to each other *in the encounter*. Third, I am not explicitly seeking to define blame or argue for any particular definition of blame; for a working concept, I will take blame to consist of at least some sort of judgment of blameworthiness as well as tending to have an expressed component (or, at minimum, a desire for the judgment to be expressed or operated on in some way). Fourth, I am using a number of examples, especially literary ones, in order to convey some aspects of my points within this work. The primary reason for this is that some aspects of what I am concerned with in the blame encounters concerns a way of *seeing* the other person in the encounter; there are ways in which this concern eludes narrow or explicit description but may not be as resistant to narrative in the same way.

With these things in mind, I can now outline and flow of this work. Here, in the "Prelude," I will begin by sketching out two ways of seeing the "world," namely that of the characters Rorschach and Ozymandias from the graphic novel *Watchmen*. Following this I will briefly overview some of the relevant terms for the following discussion and attempt to lay the groundwork for the second chapter.

Chapter two, "Encounters," is an in-depth analysis of the structures of what I am calling "theories of blame" and "theorized blame." Here, I will try to

lay out some notions of “accounts” and “theories,” generally, as well as detail what might be involved in developing an account of theory of blame. By theorized blame, I mean a way of seeing another which is theoretical in orientation; this term and others will be unpacked and clarified.

The third chapter is titled “Interlude,” and consists primarily of a further development of the character analyses of Rorschach and Ozymandias with particular attention to connecting the analyses to the concerns unpacked within “Encounters.”

The following chapter, “Pathologies,” consists of an exploration of the nature of pathological instances of blame. Here, I am concerned to address the types of normative considerations that typically surround blame encounters, and then to connect this notion of pathological blame to the concerns of theories of blame and theorized blame which I have been developing.

Chapter five, “Manifestations,” is a continuation of the previous concerns which seeks to take the developments from “Encounters” and “Pathologies,” and to make them more concrete. Given the concerns of theorized blame which I am seeking to develop, some aspects of the pathological instances with which I am concerned may become more apparent in being shown rather than only told.

Finally, this work concludes with the “Postlude,” in which I seek only to point to the possibility of non-theorized blame; that is, assuming that the concerns of pathology and blame that I have laid out are moving in the right

direction of assessing the problem, my examples in the “Postlude” are intended to present the possibility of an alternative.

### **1.1.1 The World is Fallen**

The graphic novel *Watchmen* takes place in 1984 in an America with an alternate history, much of which is caused by the presence of a formerly-human-but-now-supernatural being known as Dr. Manhattan. Within the story, the world is on the brink of nuclear warfare, and our focus is on numerous characters who used to be or still are costumed heroes. After a former costumed hero is murdered, an individual who goes by the name Rorschach begins an investigation that leads to the discovery of a plot that has worldwide implications.

Rorschach is, by most accounts, a troubled person (even if he might still be considered *heroic* in some way). He seems brutal and strange, a vicious vigilante with a rigid code of conduct and a dark opinion of the world around him. He prowls the city streets, delivering justice even though it is illegal for “costumed heroes” to operate anymore. Unlike other comic book heroes like Superman or Captain America, and even unlike some of the “darker” heroes like Batman or Daredevil, Rorschach is not afraid to kill if that is what justice requires.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We will leave aside the question of whether or not justice can require killing.

*Watchman* opens with these words:

Rorschach's Journal. October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1985.: Dog carcass in alley this morning, tire tread on burst stomach. This city is afraid of me. I have seen its true face. The streets are extended gutters and the gutters are full of blood and when the drains finally scab over, all the vermin will drown. The accumulated filth of all their sex and murder will foam up about their waists and all the whores and politicians will look up and shout 'Save us!'... and I'll look down, and whisper 'no.' They had a choice, all of them. They could have followed in the footsteps of good men like my father, or President Truman. Decent men, who believed in a day's work for a day's pay. Instead they followed the droppings of lechers and communists and didn't realize that the trail led over a precipice until it was too late. Don't tell me they didn't have a choice.<sup>2</sup>

Rorschach's view of the world around him seems to extend beyond the individuals to become a judgment of the city as a whole (and perhaps is further reaching than this; surely the immorality with which he is concerned does not reside only in New York City). He has diagnosed a malaise. He has seen the city's "true face." And the reality is that the city is evil, it is fallen. The filth seems to have become part of the nature of the city itself, like a virus that infects everything around it. Rorschach sees this state – this virus – and is obligated to do something about it. He waits and he watches, and then he executes judgment. There is some ambiguity here in our term "judgment." In the first sense, we have a cognitive judgment: *the world is fallen*. In the second sense, we have an expressed or an enacted judgment: *delivering the punishment for sin*. To say that

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Moore, *Watchmen: The Deluxe Edition*, (New York: DC Comics, 2013), 9.

Rorschach executes judgment is not just to say that he has this cognitive judgment about the condition of the city and those in it, but also to say that he is expressing the judgment. Another way of capturing this distinction is to say that Rorschach makes a judgment of blameworthiness and then blames those who are blameworthy.

Now, it seems that it cannot be the case that Rorschach thinks everyone in the city is evil. Though he says he has seen the true face of the city, it doesn't seem to be the case he means that everyone is involved in the "filth." Even if Rorschach himself may not realize it yet, he doesn't really think this is true. Firstly, Rorschach doesn't just kill everyone he comes across. He's not an insane murderer. Considering that he's willing to kill in pursuit of justice and the statements he makes above, it would seem consistent to expect Rorschach would just start killing everyone he comes across since everyone is a part of the city and instrumental in its filth.<sup>3</sup> This, however, is not what he does. He waits until he sees a crime committed and then he acts. So the world-judgment is, at best, a psychological observation about the state of people in the city – about their tendencies. It is a part of his framework of viewing the world, and it allows him to issue his particular judgments quickly since he has already diagnosed the

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<sup>3</sup> Even if Rorschach doesn't or couldn't carry it out for some reason (perhaps the actions are just too "inhuman" for him to carry out), it seems consistent with the rest of his way of seeing the world that he would at least *consider* this option – *if* he does indeed think that everyone is equally blameworthy.

problem. Secondly, and most crucially, when the resolution of the story brings about an opportunity for half of the city to be wiped out as a way of trying to save the world, Rorschach firmly resists this response. He calls such an action “evil.”<sup>4</sup> So, in diagnosing the city as evil, in making this judgment of blameworthiness, he doesn’t actually mean for it to hold to all particulars already. For Rorschach, the sickness and filth of the city is a background condition that informs his understanding of the world. The city is infected with a virus, but not everyone will exhibit symptoms. The diagnosis, though, means that when symptoms are shown the disease is already known. The blameworthiness can then be applied and blame carried out.

Close to the end of the first chapter of *Watchmen*, there is another excerpt from Rorschach’s journal as he reflects on the death of a costumed vigilante:

Nobody cares. Nobody cares but me. Are they right? Is it futile? Soon there will be war. Millions will burn. Millions will perish in sickness and misery. Why does one death matter against so many? Because there is good and there is evil, and evil must be punished. Even in the face of Armageddon I shall not compromise in this. But there are so many deserving of retribution... and there is so little time.<sup>5</sup>

Rorschach shows his deontological colors here. There’s good and evil, he says, and the evil has to be punished. There is never any reason why one is allowed to do evil – a belief which will later cost Rorschach his life. Rorschach

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<sup>4</sup> Moore, *Watchmen*, 405.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, *Watchmen*, 32.

sees the world. The world is fallen. There are many deserving of retribution. No matter what is happening, no matter what is going on around him, he will seek out the evil ones and deliver judgment. There are many factors affecting Rorschach's way of seeing the world, factors that have shaped who he is – political, social, and personal influences. He has a definite right-leaning political bias, his father was never present in his life, his mother was a prostitute and physically abused him, other children mocked him because of his mother, and so on. The rape and murder of a woman while others watched and did nothing is what he claims drove him into the world of costumed heroes. After hearing what happened to this woman, he created a mask which was to be “a face that I could bear to look at in the mirror.”<sup>6</sup>

Earlier in his career as a crime-fighter, Rorschach had a partner, Nite Owl, and the two of them had some successful ventures into the field, cleaning up the streets. Rorschach had not yet begun to kill. Toward the end of chapter six of *Watchmen*, Rorschach conveys the moment that everything changed for him – the moment that cemented who he *really* is. He had been investigating the kidnapping of a six-year-old and his investigation led him to a building in Brooklyn. He went and investigated the location where he found the remains of the girl who had been murdered and discovered her bones had been fed to dogs. When the perpetrator arrived, Rorschach tied him up and burned him alive in

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<sup>6</sup> Moore, *Watchmen*, 188.



the building. As Rorschach tells the story to his psychiatrist, he finishes the story with the following words:

Stood in firelight, sweltering. Bloodstain on chest like map of violent new continent. Felt cleansed. Felt dark planet turn under my feet and knew what cats know that makes them scream like babies in night. Looked at sky through smoke heavy with human fat and god was not there. The cold, suffocating dark goes on forever, and we are alone. Live our lives, lacking anything better to do. Devise reason later. Born from oblivion; bear children, hell-bound as ourselves; go into oblivion. There is nothing else. Existence is random. Has no pattern save what we imagine after staring at it for too long. No meaning save what we choose to impose. This rudderless world is not shaped by vague metaphysical forces. It is not God who kills the children. Not fate that butchers them or destiny that feeds them to the dogs. It's us. Only us. Streets stank of fire. The void breathed hard on my heart, turning its illusions to ice, shattering them. Was reborn then, free to scrawl own design on this morally blank world. Was Rorschach.<sup>7</sup>

This is how Rorschach sees the world. His encounters with the darkness and evil of the world have driven him to these conclusions and he becomes transformed beneath their weight. He no longer partners with others. He becomes even more secluded, sleeps through the day, and seemingly takes no pleasure in life. He exists solely to impose retribution upon the evil-doers. We might call these events a sort of transitional nihilism. On the other side of it, Rorschach determined his moral code: punish evil.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Moore, *Watchmen*, 204.

<sup>8</sup> As philosophers, we may protest that Rorschach doesn't seem to have a particularly well-founded morality. He appears to determine good and evil in its particulars by reference to his upbringing, background, and experiences with little evidence of critical reflection. This is, of course true, but also is seemingly the state of the vast majority of the world. Reflection on meta-ethical concerns or the justification of a normative ethical theory (or even consistent application of a coherent normative ethical theory) are exceptions rather than rules for human conduct as we find it in the world. That this is the case is not intended to be negative; it seems likely that for

So we return to Rorschach's first thoughts in his journal entry: there is judgment and condemnation of the filth and immorality he sees in the city.

What I would like to particularly take note of here is the nature of Rorschach's judgment of the world. It is sweeping and it is abstract and it is theoretical. Though he never communicates a precise list of what actions he deems to be evil ones, among them appear to be included murder, rape, theft, prostitution, and homosexuality. When his judgment occurs, it occurs simply based on whether or not the rule was broken. "Did you do evil, then you deserve judgment. I don't need to have a conversation with you; I don't need to know anything about you; I don't even need to know who you are. I don't need to see your face or view you in any personal ways. I only need to know whether or not you fit into my categories of *blameworthiness*."

The benefit of having narrow and precise conditions is that it makes it easier to interact in the world. Judgment is simply a process of comparison, of checking off lists. Rorschach's world-judgment determines how he will judge a world – Rorschach's sight of the world clouds his sight of the worlds he encounters – that is, his sight of *persons*.

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most people there is not a need to do this – or at the very least, it may be impractical to expect this. Regardless, my concerns regarding blame and blameworthiness are oriented toward how we find it in the world, practiced by people generally.

### 1.1.2 The World Can Be Saved by Me

In contrast to Rorschach in many ways is the character Ozymandias. The two know each other, and at one point served together as costumed heroes before such actions were outlawed. Ozymandias is known sometimes as “The Smartest Man Alive,” and works hard to craft a particular image of himself. He is one of the only costumed heroes who reveals his identity to the public. After setting aside his vigilantism, Ozymandias becomes a businessman, invests in various enterprises, sells a self-help program to help others become intelligent and strong like himself, and develops a television show and line of action figures based on himself.

It turns out that a main function of these enterprises is to raise money for a separate project, a secret project. Ozymandias has a plan to “fake” an alien invasion. The details are not important here, but the goal is that Ozymandias hopes to steer the world away from the brink of nuclear Armageddon. His plan involves an elaborate and detailed (and within the context of the story, convincing) alien invasion which would destroy half of the population of New York City. If the plan is successful, Ozymandias believes it will unite the world in opposition to the alien threat and thereby stop or at least delay nuclear warfare.

Unlike Rorschach, Ozymandias is more than willing to do something that he thinks is wrong in some sense in order to bring about the greatest good – a very consequentialist approach. Ozymandias does not appear to see the world as evil, exactly. He doesn’t seem to place the judgment upon the shoulders of those

*in* the world. He says, “Thus began my path to conquest... conquest not of men, but of the evils that beset them.”<sup>9</sup> The threat of nuclear holocaust, then, is not something that evil people in the world are going to do, but an evil that will happen because people are weak. When the pressures mount and tensions rise, this weakness is made manifest. People act out of their insecurities and flaws.

Ozymandias is never precisely clear about the above point, but it seems to be implicit within his intended resolution and his plans afterward. A diversion that removes the threat of nuclear warfare and brings people together makes more sense if the cause in the first place was related to weakness and circumstances rather than the intrinsic evil of humanity.<sup>10</sup> Ozymandias says, “Brutally, I’d been brought nose to nose with mankind’s mortality; the dreadful, irrefutable fact of it. For the first time, I genuinely understood that the earth might die. I recognized the fragility of our world in increasingly hazardous times.”<sup>11</sup> The chief problem in the world is not that people are evil, but that they are weak, fragile – the *world* is fragile.

Again, though, as with Rorschach, we should be careful in how we conceive of this judgment of weakness. This is not necessarily a judgment that applies to all possible individuals in the world. It is a background consideration

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<sup>9</sup> Moore, *Watchmen*, 359.

<sup>10</sup> Or, at least, it seems plausible to think that weakness might be something that could eventually be overcome whereas evil seems less amenable to this idea.

<sup>11</sup> Moore, *Watchmen*, 368.

that forms a general view on the nature of humankind. Ozymandias does not seem to believe necessarily that every individual person is weak, only that when seen as a whole, this trait becomes manifest and threatens to lead to self-destruction. This is a cognitive judgment forming the way Ozymandias views the world. However, the application of it becomes massively different than that of Rorschach. Rorschach has his way of seeing the world and then applies it in instances as things correspond with his notions of good and evil. Ozymandias, on the other hand, has identified a better state – a better future. One in which there is a cessation of nuclear conflict and Ozymandias himself will then guide the world into becoming strong so that the future possibility of conflict is erased. In order to bring about this state, though, sacrifices must be made.

Ozymandias goes through with his plan, and half of New York City is destroyed. The plan, while seemingly outlandish, is fabricated with such detail and scope that it is believed. The world begins to unite in response to the alien invasion. Ozymandias then says, “I saved earth from hell. Next, I’ll help her towards utopia.”<sup>12</sup> This can be done because, as already said, Ozymandias believes it is only weakness and circumstances that are holding us back. The world needs a *guide*. A prophet to lead them into the new era. In an interview before this plan is unleashed, Ozymandias answers a question about his personal

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<sup>12</sup> Moore, *Watchmen*, 402.

philosophy, saying “I have studied science, art, religion and a hundred different philosophies. Anyone could do as much. By applying what you learn and ordering your thoughts in an intelligent manner it is possible to accomplish almost anything. Possible for the ‘ordinary person.’ There’s a notion I’d like to see buried: the ordinary person. Ridiculous. There is no ordinary person.”<sup>13</sup>

Ozymandias sees the world as weak and needing a savior. So how does this framework of judgment, what we might call a judgment of blameworthiness, take place? Humans, in general, are blameworthy of being weak. It is this weakness which has forced Ozymandias into his current plan. When it comes time to carry out his plan, it is not clear that he affords any distinction among persons. Even if there is some particular individual who is not weak, he may still fall into the consequences of Ozymandias’ plan. Does Ozymandias *blame* those who are killed in his plan? As individuals, it doesn’t seem so, and there certainly doesn’t seem to be an impassioned sort of blame in the way we often see blame expressed. Nonetheless, Ozymandias’ actions might reasonably fall under this category. On the grounds of Ozymandias’ view of the nature of humanity and the conditions of the possibility of eminent nuclear warfare, Ozymandias has taken his world-judgment of blameworthiness for weakness and placed it upon each person whom he kills. To see them this way – to kill them as representations of the weakness of the world – is to blame them (at least to blame them *as proxies*

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<sup>13</sup> Moore, *Watchmen*, 379.

or *representations*). Another way of thinking about this might be to acknowledge that there is a certain amount of contradiction within Ozymandias' view. While, on reflection, he might not be willing to say that each individual is blameworthy or weak, his actions indicate otherwise. The reason the contradiction becomes less obvious is because Ozymandias never actually turns his attention *to the individuals*.

It is worth noting that Ozymandias' actions are also slightly different in terms of the manifestation of blame since a sort of "punishing" of the victims for their blameworthiness is not obviously the primary point of his actions. He is using his victims instrumentally, as a way of proceeding to his further goals of "saving the world." Even though Ozymandias sees these individuals he kills as instrumental and may not be viewing his actions as a "punishing of blameworthiness," something like this might still be at work. Not every instance of blame is self-consciously an act of punishment for blameworthiness. Regardless, what is most relevant for these examples is not just that we identify a particular instance of blame at work, but also that we highlight a particular way of seeing the other person in the interaction.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Our primary focus within this work is "blame," because this is where the philosophical and psychological conversation is taking place; however, I am open to a broader interpretation of these interactions, perhaps relating to the more broad and ambiguous term "judgment," as well as considerations of seeing others which might extend beyond the confines of "blame encounters." And so quibbling over whether Ozymandias' and, later, Raskolnikov's motivations and actions fit smoothly within a rubric of "blame encounters," is, in many ways, irrelevant to the primary points in discussion.

The judgment of Ozymandias takes a different form, but nonetheless might be called blame (or at least a moral judgment followed by an enacted and deadly “consequence”). Not blame that takes its targets as individuals, but one which must see the targets under the general label of “human and weak.” “Are you a member of humanity? Then your life may be forfeit if that means the rest of humanity can be improved. I don’t need to have a conversation with you; I don’t need to know anything about you; I don’t even need to know who you are. I don’t need to see your face or view you in any personal ways. I only need to know whether or not you fit within my categories of *blameworthiness* – which at this moment, only means that you are human and preventing the flourishing of a greater number of humans.”

## **1.2 I Am a World**

Considering that blame may sometimes lead to terrible consequences, is it a good or useful thing? Does it have a point? This question brings itself to our attention in different ways. One way might be that the consequences of blame can include punishment, death, ridicule, and so forth, and these consequences may sometimes seem to be too strong of a response for whatever was done. Another way the question might bring itself to our attention is in the misuse of blame: I execute vengeance upon some individual I’ve labeled as blameworthy, but this person was not actually blameworthy. This one, certainly, seems to be



common. Much of the history of violence, genocide, and mistreatment might be connected to this idea of blaming others for something that we (or someone) now consider not to be a blameworthy action or condition, etc.

In his work *In Praise of Blame*, George Sher illustrates various perspectives that do hold this view: that blame is not a good interpersonal strategy and something else might need to take its place.<sup>15</sup> Derk Pereboom, for instance, suggests “moral admonishment and encouragement” might be a better strategy for dealing with typically blameworthy behavior.<sup>16</sup> For Pereboom, this is because of his stance on free will (we don’t have it) and the reality that no one can actually be morally responsible if everything one does is determined. For the most part, however, this is a minority position within the literature. Sher suggests that, in the end, blame is intrinsically connected to morality in such a way that to dispense with one is to dispense with the other. Blame is a way of taking morality seriously.

Another area of discussion has been the nature of blame, such as whether or not its characteristic “force” is excessive,<sup>17</sup> as well as a concern that some philosophical models or presentations of blame seem to be too “civilized.” That

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<sup>15</sup> George Sher, *In Praise of Blame*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Derk Pereboom, “Determinism *al Dente*,” *Nous* Vol. 29, No. 1 (Mar., 1995), pp. 21-45, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2215725>.

<sup>17</sup> Pamela Hieronymi, “The Force and Fairness of Blame,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 18, *Ethics* 2004.

is, that some understandings of blame seem to be lacking enough force for blame to be effective.<sup>18</sup> Overall, though, the current philosophical project appears to be one in which we generally hold that blame is a normal and necessary function of human life, but we also recognize that blame can be misused. Because of this tension, we philosophers want to provide a clear account or theory, so that we can determine what blame is and when it is acceptably implemented within the world.

The project has overlapping concerns with psychology and moral psychology, and accounts of blame now abound from both the psychological and philosophical perspectives. A very popular psychological account is “A Theory of Blame,” by Bertram F. Malle, Steve Guglielmo, and Andrew E. Monroe. Their work is exceedingly descriptive and they attempt to lay out what they call the “Path Model of Blame,” which captures how blame progresses within agents.<sup>19</sup> Within the philosophical literature, classic works like P. F. Strawson’s “Freedom and Resentment,”<sup>20</sup> as well as more recent treatments such as George Sher’s *In*

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<sup>18</sup> Victoria McGeer, “Civilizing Blame,” in *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, edited by D. Justin Coates and Neal A Tognazzini, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Bertram F. Malle, Steve Guglielmo, and Andrew E. Monroe, “A Theory of Blame,” *Psychological Inquiry* 25, (2014), pp. 147-186, doi: 10.1080/1047840X.2014.877340.

<sup>20</sup> P. F. Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*, (New York: Routledge, 2008).

*Praise of Blame*,<sup>21</sup> T. M. Scanlon's *Moral Dimensions*,<sup>22</sup> Stephen Darwall's *The Second-Person Standpoint*,<sup>23</sup> and more continue to develop an understanding of blame and accountability. Intrinsic to (or implicit within) each of these projects is the developing of a *theory* that can describe the nature of blame.

However, the purpose of this work is to suggest that there is a limitation that arises when trying to move from the theoretical models to our experiences in the world. In the chapter entitled "Encounters," I wish to show the structural problems of theories of blame and what I have called *theorized blame*, by which I mean something like the construction and application of our analyses and theories of the nature of blame and blameworthiness, as well as a certain way of seeing the other in the blaming encounter, respectively. In the chapters entitled "Pathologies" and "Manifestations," I intend to show what some of the consequences of theories of blame and theorized blame might be in practice; that is, what we stand to lose by not being sufficiently aware of the limitations of these issues. Within this, I will also try to illustrate part of what I think is lacking, at least as a start to addressing this problem. It is also hoped that understanding the issues in this way will help to elucidate the ways in which blame seems to

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<sup>21</sup> George Sher, *In Praise of Blame*.

<sup>22</sup> T. M. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

“go wrong” or become “problematic,” without compromising our ability to utilize blame as a way of taking morality seriously.

As mentioned above, blame comes from somewhere; there is some background series of beliefs, views, etc. that combine to form my way of viewing the world—in fact, my notion of what blame is or is not and the conditions of blameworthiness would be a part of this background. Blame issues out of this when I encounter something that crosses a line. This can manifest in very instant, emotional occasions, but it may also manifest in something more calculated and long-term. I can hold it in or express it, but it definitely has power and opprobrium—at least as we typically tend to experience these occasions. I have tried to begin showing this through the characterizations of Rorschach and Ozymandias. I will return to these characterizations and draw on others as we continue forward since part of what I am trying to display is something that moves beyond the theoretical framework and contains ineliminable second-personal characteristics.<sup>24</sup>

Returning to the background or framework in which our judgments take place, the views outlining our perception of the world and our ethical encounters may be more or less explicit. To the extent that these views are propositionally and/or reflectively available and consciously held, I call them formal; to the

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<sup>24</sup> Implicit here, but not argued for, is the belief that second-personal encounters are also not reducible to propositional accounts.

extent that these are not yet propositionally and/or reflectively available and consciously held, I call them informal. This is not meant to be a strict separation, but simply to acknowledge what we are generally aware of already. Some people seem to have their moral and ethical outlooks more or less theoretically formalized;<sup>25</sup> both the philosopher and un-reflective ideologue have ways of determining who is blameworthy, but they are not both formulated and present to the blamer in the same way. To be sure, many people likely have not reflected extensively on *why* they think certain things are blameworthy, but they certainly have some ideas about blameworthiness available as this absence of reflection does not prevent us from blaming.

Both formal and informal outlooks can be either *theorized* or *attended* (or somewhere along a continuum with these concepts as the poles) in orientation. A question might arise along the lines of the following: “How can an informal view be theorized?” In the following section I will unpack my usage of these terms in much more detail. Theorized and attended orientations are ways of seeing things in the world, ways of experiencing things rather than descriptions of the content of some belief. While an informal outlook may not be very reflective or explicit in the mind of the blamer, the blaming experience may manifest in a theorized way: In the blaming encounter, I consider you abstractly based on how you fit into

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<sup>25</sup> Given our present subject, it is the ethical aspects of our *seeing the world* in which I am interested, but it is not meant to be suggested that all that exists within our seeing of the world is ethical concerns (though, perhaps, at bottom, this is true).

categories. I do not see you, but rather an aspect of you or my representation of you. I may not explicitly have the categories systematized and be able to lay them out, but I still operate with and utilize them in my blaming experiences and ethical encounters. On the other hand, the attended orientation is a way of *being in the moment*, such that I do not limit my experiences to my background categories and theories about the nature of the world.<sup>26</sup> There is an openness and depth to interactions of this sort. What is important then is to realize that on this terminology, “theory” and “theorized” are doing different work; the first relates to content while the second relates to a mode of viewing or a way of seeing.

The purpose of this work, then, is to examine these two notions (theories of blame and theorized blame) and relate them to pathologies with the purpose of understanding blame more precisely as well as illuminating the insufficiency of “purely theoretical” approaches to blame.

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<sup>26</sup> These will be unpacked fully and argued for in the following section.

## Chapter 2

### Encounters: The Structures of Theories and Theorized Blame

*This universal living scene of things is after all as little a logical world as it is a poetical; and, as it cannot without violence be exalted into poetic perfection, neither can it be attenuated into logical formulation.*

- John Henry Newman

*It was so much easier to blame it on Them. It was bleakly depressing to think that They were Us. If it was Them, then nothing was anyone's fault. If it was Us, what did that make Me? After all, I'm one of Us. I must be. I've certainly never thought of myself as one of Them. No one ever thinks of themselves as one of Them. We're always one of Us. It's Them that do bad things.*

- From *Jingo* by Terry Pratchett

### 2.1 Worthy of Blame

What could it mean to be blameworthy? Worthy of blame? Worthy of being blamed – an odd thing of which to be worthy. I have crossed a line, someone's line (morality's line?), somewhere. In one sense, perhaps there is an easy way of trying to assess blameworthiness. Here, one might say, is an instance of blame.<sup>27</sup> This person did this thing, a thing one certainly should not do, and

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<sup>27</sup> Notice how easy it is to shift to the third-person.

this other person now blames him for having done this thing.<sup>28</sup> Together, you and I, we can look on at this situation: Was this first person justified in any way in what he did? Was he in a state of moral ignorance?<sup>29</sup> Perhaps someone forced or otherwise causatively influenced his actions or he was “not himself.”<sup>30</sup> Maybe he is a psychopath and unable to come to the “proper moral conclusions.”<sup>31</sup> It may be the case that the line-crosser’s past is relevant.<sup>32</sup>

What about the other person, the blamer? How much did he know about the situation?<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the situation was not accurately assessed or the blamer is

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<sup>28</sup> Notice also that I am sidestepping entirely the question of what blame itself is – this is a movement I will repeat throughout this work.

<sup>29</sup> For excuses of this sort and others, see Erin I. Kelly, “What Is an Excuse” in Coates and Tognazzini, eds., *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, pp. 244-262, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), particularly pp. 255-257.

<sup>30</sup> See P. F. Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” pp. 8-9, for a discussion of situations that might elicit resentment and the circumstances in which this resentment might be ameliorated.

<sup>31</sup> For detailed treatment of this problem, see Gary Watson, “The Trouble with Psychopaths,” in Wallace, Kumar, and Freeman, eds., *Reasons and Recognition: Essays on the Philosophy of T. M. Scanlon*, (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2012, ebook).

<sup>32</sup> T. M. Scanlon expresses this concern in the following way, “...we are also sometimes inclined to think that [people who commit terrible crimes] cannot properly be blamed if, as seems likely, their characters and actions are caused by factors outside of them, over which they have no control.” T. M. Scanlon, “Interpreting Blame,” in Coates and Tognazzini, eds., *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, pp. 84-99, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 84.

<sup>33</sup> Marilyn Friedman suggests that there are at least three requirements for a blamer to be considered responsible in blaming: the blamer must “grasp and apply moral norms,” “be motivated to act accordingly,” and “give a reasons-responsive account of [the blamed person’s] apparent moral failures.” Marilyn Friedman, “How to Blame People Responsibly,” *J Value Inquiry* 47, (2013), pp. 271-284, doi: 10.1007/s10790-013-9377-x, p. 273.



hypocritical or otherwise compromised in his standing to blame.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, you and I may ask about and seek to obtain the moral facts of the situation. And, it would seem that these are all relevant concerns. Once we can answer the questions raised, we can assess whether or not so-and-so was blameworthy in this particular situation and thus the blame justified or not.

If I am equipped with sufficient encounters and analyses of this sort, perhaps I can say that given such-and-such conditions hold, given that so-and-so did these things, someone would be justified or not in blaming in situations of this sort. By analysis, by breaking down the situation I can try to come closer and closer to identification of the necessary and sufficient – or at least relevant – conditions of blameworthiness and justification in blaming. By examining hypothetical or real previous situations, I can begin the work of picking out just what features are relevant and then either producing a theory<sup>35</sup> or perhaps a

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<sup>34</sup> There is currently significant debate over the notion of “standing to blame” and the problems or not of hypocrisy and other related factors of the blamer. For some insightful treatments, see Macalester Bell, “The Standing to Blame: A Critique,” in Coates and Tognazzini, eds., *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, pp. 263-281, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Ori J. Herstein, “Understanding Standing: Permission to Deflect Reasons,” *Philosophical Studies* 174, (2017), pp. 3109-3132, doi: 10.1007/s11098-016-0849-2; and Matt King, “Skepticism about the Standing to Blame,” in Shoemaker, ed., *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility Volume 6*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> For two well-received though heavily debated philosophical accounts see George Sher, *In Praise of Blame*, and T. M. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*; for an account from the field of psychology, see Bertram F. Malle, Steve Guglielmo, and Andrew E. Monroe, “A Theory of Blame.”

paradigm.<sup>36</sup> Usually, in contemporary analytical philosophy one proceeds by way of developing a theory of blame. The theory then tells me under what conditions blame is appropriate or inappropriate, and thus when someone is or is not blameworthy. The implicit intuition, then, is that if I am equipped with a correct account of blame, as I encounter the world I can accurately assess when someone is or is not blameworthy (including myself), and thus blame correctly.<sup>37</sup> Much like the way in which as long as I know the correct moral theory, I can now encounter the world and all of its situations by bringing my moral theory to bear on the situations I experience.

And this is why the theories are developed, right? So that I can live *ethically*. Except that it seems there may be some problems here, and some questions to be considered. Is acquiring the moral facts in a given situation simply a process of data collection? Are these facts instances of propositional knowledge? If acquiring the moral facts requires some form of knowledge

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<sup>36</sup> A salient example of this is the following: Miranda Fricker, "What's the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation," *Nous* 50:1, (2016), pp. 165-183. We will return to Fricker's work in detail in "Pathologies."

<sup>37</sup> Perhaps this is not the intended inference of theories of blame, though it does appear to be implied in many cases. In Fricker's article one of the first things she does is detail "pathologies" of blame which she sees as the sort of things an account of blame should help one explain and avoid (implying the account should relate to practice in this way). Scanlon makes a similar point in his article "Interpreting Blame," when he writes, "A satisfactory account of blame should be as faithful as possible to the phenomenology of blaming and to our judgments about when it is appropriate to blame people and in what degree," (T. M. Scanlon, "Interpreting Blame," 84). Both of these accounts emphasize the connection between the theoretical work and experiences in the world. Perhaps still this is only meant to be backward-looking, as a way of assessing past situations rather than preparing one for future situations; I will take this point in more detail below.

regarding the self and the other as well as the actual actions, words, or symbols that have been involved in the line-crossing for which blame is being leveled, how would I go about acquiring this knowledge of persons? Is it warranted to think that such knowledge of persons would be distillable into a propositional account by means of a theory? Even if one were to deny this sort of knowledge of persons was needed, would it be possible to adequately and accurately separate the line-crossing from either the line-crosser or the one who has called out the crossing of the line? On the other side of blame, that is, on the forward-looking side, would the possession of a theory adequately prepare me for the actual situations in which blame is manifested in my life? Can the abstract contents of a theory sufficiently apply to the concrete experiences of the world in this way? More narrowly, can the abstract *as abstract* apply to the concrete? And, verily, on both sides of an account of blame this seems to be part of the challenge – I must take what is concrete, generate it into an abstract formulation, and then hope that as an abstract formulation (or without acknowledging how and when it might become something different) it can apply to new concrete situations.

The theories of blame and blameworthiness on offer – and in principle – are disconnected from my experiences in the world in a way that is important and needs addressing. There are two pieces here: the first is the content, that is, the theory itself, and the second is the perspective, that is, the way in which I experience the other or see them in the blaming encounter. In general, I consider experiencing the world through the “lens of theory” to be *theorizing* our

encounters with others, which we can do both formally and informally. To unpack this, I will begin by explaining what I mean by *seeing* the world (or *apprehension*), formal and informal ways of seeing the world, and the nature of *theorizing* as opposed to other ways of encountering the world. I will then take a formally developed theory of blame conveyed by Hanna Pickard (and, I believe, fairly representative of the *methodology* of most accounts of blame) which she calls “ideally rational affective blame” as an example to analyze further. I am not directly concerned with the contents or accuracy of the theories or with what blame is.<sup>38</sup> What I am concerned with is how one goes about *constructing* an account and what the practical ramifications of such an account would be *in practice*, as well as the way in which I see the other in the blaming encounter and how the theory relates to this.

## **2.2 Blame with a View**

### **2.2.1 Prolegomena to Any Future Theory of Blame**

As I encounter the world, I start to compare certain phenomena to other phenomena and abstract out the common properties. In doing this, I become more prepared to face new things, as I can begin to identify trends and patterns that give me a sort of “leg up” in new encounters. The new things are no longer

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<sup>38</sup> Which is not to say that these concerns are unimportant in their own right.

*completely new* so long as I've accurately assessed the general properties or common features of my previous experiences.

When I walk into a room for the first time, I don't stop to question everything in the room. I've seen tables, artwork, chairs, desks, fireplaces, and so forth enough times that they don't generally present themselves to me as immediate concerns. They are there, and if I turn my attention toward them, I can take stock of them, but they are not often what is immediately presented to my consciousness since I have encountered them sufficient times in the past. I have seen enough chairs to have a sort of general account of *chairness*, and the nature and function of chairs is clear enough to me. Unless I have a special interest in the complexities and uniqueness of different chairs, or the chair is sufficiently different from all of my previous encounters with chairs (but also retains enough *chairness* to be recognizable *as a chair*), then I will likely not attend to the chair. The chair fits into what is already known. I have a background *account* or *theory* of *chairness* that is operative, even if it is not something I have consciously reflected on and constructed.

This sort of seeing the world gives me the power to generalize. My encounters and the process of viewing things in this way, give me data that I can store as "background information." This background data can then be distributed, at least partially, to new experiences which seem to be consonant in appropriate ways. The first chair may be a purely new experience, but the encounter provides me some content regarding *chairness* (or at least content

about *this* chair). After a few more chairs, I've got some sort of account or theory of chairs generally, and I can now generalize this information into new experiences.

This type of background account is often informal. It happens intuitively. Unless some other reason (such as being a carpenter or engineer) has impelled me, my understanding of chairs is fairly unreflective and general. Chairs have a function and typical design that is simply part of my ongoing awareness of the world. I could perhaps *formalize* my understanding of chairs by apprehending them in a new way. Rather than experiencing the chair in its Heideggerian handy-ness, I might stop to take stock of it. I might examine the construction, the material of which it is made, and so on, and then deliberate on what the common or accidental properties of chairs would be. I could try to write out a propositional account of chairs, seeking to understand the nature of chairness as far as possible. To the extent that I do these sorts of things, I see the chair in an abstract way, and formalize my account.

And so I have different kinds of accounts or theories in the background of my general existence, which we might call altogether a worldview. My worldview will consist of various degrees of formality and informality for different accounts or theories that I have.<sup>39</sup> When it comes to my ethical

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<sup>39</sup> Moving forward I will usually refer to informal structures as "accounts," and formal structures as "theories." The movement is somewhat arbitrary but is meant to reinforce the sort of "fleshed-out" or theoretical nature of the formal structures as opposed to the informal

intuitions, many of these may have informal characteristics. For instance, when I say, “Well, that’s just wrong,” and then I am asked “Why?” but I cannot answer, it seems the reason is that whatever judgment I am making has an informal character. Perhaps I know that lying is wrong, but when pressed to explain why this is so, I may not be able to convey the reasons. The person who cannot explain why lying is wrong has, on my view, an informal account of lying. What could this mean? How could someone have an informal account of lying and not be able to explain what lying is? Because, in this case, the informal account does not require explanation in order to be implemented as an account – the same way that I do not need to explain what a chair is in order to be able to use a chair or recognize a chair.

This sort of informal account of lying is pretty threadbare, certainly, but it’s there, and it may be something like “Lying is not telling the truth and it’s a bad thing.”<sup>40</sup> This, of course, is not necessarily something the person would have presented to themselves in this way, but something like this is at work in *having a concept of lying* as opposed to knowing an empty term “lying” which has no meaning to the user (such as in the case of a German speaker who doesn’t know English hearing the word “lying”; of course the German speaker probably still

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structure which is more impressionistic, unrefined, and unreflected. In the end, though, nothing turns precisely on this way of conveying things.

<sup>40</sup> If we wanted to convey this as an element of propositional knowledge, we could express it as, “I know that lying is not telling the truth and that it is a bad thing.”

has some concept of “lügen” in this case). Having the concept may arise in different ways: maybe someone taught me this, maybe I heard it in a religious setting, maybe people lied to me and I was hurt by it, and so forth. All of these things reinforced my informal account of lying. To the extent that it is informal, I didn't sit and reflect on these things. I simply took them in the way I took in the function and basic nature of *chairness*.

At this point you may be wondering what any of this has to do with our concerns regarding blame, which would be a fair question. The purpose for illustrating these concepts of formality and informality is that they will track onto my presentation of theories of blame and theorized blame, and allow the inference that theorized blame is not just a problem when there is a worked-out formal theory, but also in informal cases. These informal instances of theorized blame may be more difficult to discern because the relevant ethical rules are not explicit or explicitly justified, but they are likely more prevalent. By having these conceptions, it will become clearer how theorized blame functions in practice in the world.

A few more things are relevant here. First, implicit on this view of holding an account of something is that the individual with an informal account (and the one with a theory, to the degree that any theory is not perfect) has opened a way of being non-self-transparent (or self-opaque, if you prefer). Generally, my realization that I don't know why I think lying is wrong occurs after a situation forces me into this realization. It is possible, then, on my presentation, to have



informal accounts in which I don't realize that I don't have reasons for these things. There are things I believe, hold to be true, and will hold others accountable to, but which are not reflectively worked through or rationally held.<sup>41</sup> And, indeed, I believe this relates to a rather substantial number of our views about the world. The self-opacity is a form of "not knowing what you don't know," or, more appropriately to our concerns, "not having reflected on what you're ready to hold others accountable to."

Secondly, we can consider for a moment the complexity with which this might manifest in blaming encounters. The scenarios themselves are too varied and complex to fully detail, but we can at least consider different ways in which I might respond to some instance of line-crossing. I can respond from my immediate affective response, from the guidance or wisdom of some figure, or from some reflective, theoretical, or rationally developed position. Now, all of these are *ways* of responding, and can all rely on a structure which is informal or formal. In all of these cases, whatever worldview, whatever account or theory is relevant to the given situation, becomes the backdrop for the way I respond. Clearly, a reflective, theoretical, or rationally developed response seems to presuppose a level of formality to the theory on which I am relying in my response. It may also be the case, though, that this happens more fluidly. I have

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<sup>41</sup> "Rationally held" is a problematic phrase and I use it very loosely, so don't read too much into it.

some sort of informal account of lying and as this encounter with a liar unfolds, I engage in some form of reflection or critically working through the encounter. My account becomes more formal in the moment of encounter as I learn something new or deeper about the nature of lying. This is possible, though not necessary. The point of all of this is that there is a certain messiness to our experiences in the world. The terms “formal” and “informal” are meant to roughly capture scalar concepts.

### **2.2.2 Theorized Blame**

When I employ the term “theorized blame,” the first thought may be that it primarily relates to blaming with the use of a theory. If, however, this is all that is meant, the appropriate objection given the preceding section is that all blame might conceivably be theorized blame. And this would be true. Given the way I am using “account” and “theory” and the new terms of “formal” and “informal,” which I have introduced, all of our interactions convey some form of theory or account unless it is a completely new encounter for us. And so all instances of blame would be instances of theory-informed blame except perhaps for completely novel encounters (even here, this is unlikely, since encounters are made up of virtually infinite components and *some* theory or account will generally be operative even if there is something within the encounter that is novel).

What then, might I mean by “theorized blame”? Roughly, theorized blame is blame which *sees* or *apprehends* the blaming encounter through a primarily theoretical lens; in another way, we may say that theorized blame is blame in which the primary way of seeing the blaming encounter is through notional apprehension. John Henry Newman distinguished between two terms, the first called “notional apprehension,” and the second called “real apprehension.” For Newman, notional propositions are “abstract, general, and non-existing,” while real propositions are “external to us, unit and individual.”<sup>42</sup> Essentially, the point of the distinction regards the way in which the individual apprehends the propositions. The term “proposition” here might serve to complicate things unnecessarily. Newman is trying to suggest that whether it is some logical principle or some experiential sense datum (or anything else apprehensible in the relevant ways), we can conceive of it as a “proposition,” and then apprehend this “proposition” either in a notional or a real way. I think trying to view the matter in terms of “propositions” obfuscates rather than clarifies things. Moving forward, we will focus more on the distinction as distinguishing the *way of apprehending* rather than the *thing apprehended*; that is, we will focus on the terms “notional” and “real” in regard to the experience of seeing rather than being concerned with what it is that is being seen.

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<sup>42</sup> John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, (Columbia, SC: Assumption Press, 2013), 7.

It will be useful now to further clarify these two concepts of “real” and “notional,” as they will enlighten my usage of “theorized” within this work.<sup>43</sup> First, in apprehending something notionally, I am concerned with *notions*, that is aspects of a thing, parts of it, in contrast to seeing something in its concrete unity (which is to apprehend *really*). For instance, in reading a poem, I can *see* it in two different ways. I may first read it in light of my training in literary techniques, breaking down the rhythmic patterns, analyzing the use of irony or alliteration, or investigating the usage of themes, considering the structure or lack thereof in the poem, and so forth. This is to see the poem *notionally* as I am reading. On the other hand, I might also read the poem in a vastly different way. I may be *in the moment*, so to speak, lost *in* the poem, taking it as it unfolds before me, and seeing it *in its concrete unity*. To read the poem in this way is to see it *really*.

Second, notional apprehension and real apprehension have different starting places. Notional apprehension generally begins within the mind, within one’s own abstracting and constructive reasoning capacities. In reading the poem, I take pieces or parts of it, and then, using my reason, I investigate and distinguish – this is all *internal*. On the other hand, real apprehension involves experience, and does not begin purely within the mind. In seeing in this way, I *encounter* something; it is before me – it is still *external* in some way.

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<sup>43</sup> I am indebted to the analyses of both John Crosby and Michael Olson here: John Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 38ff; Michael R. Olson, “Real Apprehension in Newman’s *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (2005).

A final distinction regards the relevant clarity that Newman believes we can attain with each. Notional apprehension allows for a greater clarity, and this is primarily because it has abstracted aspects from the original experience. Logic is a prime example of this: the goal is to narrow things down to as simple and precise a meaning as possible. In doing so, of course, we must pull the experiences and concrete things apart. Seeing things *really* involves seeing them still as concrete which inherently brings with it a certain obscurity.

Newman conveys this process beautifully when he writes the following:

Words, which denote things, have innumerable implications; but in inferential exercises, it is the very triumph of that clearness and hardness of head, which is the characteristic talent for the art, to have stripped them of all these connatural senses, to have drained them of that depth and breadth of associations which constitutes their poetry, their rhetoric, and their historical life, to have starved each term down till it has become the ghost of itself, and everywhere one and the same ghost, "omnibus umbra locis," so that it may stand for just one unreal aspect of the concrete thing to which it properly belongs, for a relation, a generalization, or other abstraction, for a notion neatly turned out of the laboratory of the mind, and sufficiently tame and subdued, because existing only in definition.

Thus it is that the logician for his own purposes, and most usefully as far as those purposes are concerned, turns rivers, full, winding, and beautiful, into navigable canals.<sup>44</sup>

This way of approaching things is not limited to logic, of course. The distinction is between two different ways of apprehending phenomena.

Newman's terminology applies at a larger scale to how we generally interact with and see the world. I will limit our concerns still to blame and blaming

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<sup>44</sup> John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 176.

encounters. Theorized blame is, then, a form of second-personal encounter in which notional apprehension is the dominant way of *seeing* in the encounter. Theorized blame would then be in distinction from what I will call *attended blame*, which would be a form of second-personal encounter in which real apprehension is the dominant way of *seeing* in the encounter. It must be clarified that I am not here arguing that attended blame is the correct “answer” to a problem of theorized blame.<sup>45</sup> Neither notional nor real apprehension has precedence or preference in all cases; the approaches are useful in different ways and under different circumstances. The focus on the problems of theorized blame is, then, targeted towards a specific problem which I am seeking to reveal, especially in relation to the field of philosophy. This will hopefully become increasingly apparent as we continue onward.

Theorized and attended blame then relate not to the content, or to the absence or presence of theories, but rather to how I experience the blaming encounter – how I *see* the blaming encounter and the other in it. In moments of blame, I rely on either formal or informal accounts or theories, and I blame either in a theorized or attended way (or combination) depending on how I am *seeing* in the encounter.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> If only life were so simple!

<sup>46</sup> There is much more to develop here and its likely that this is more accurately less of a scalar concept than a combination of some other things. The *encounter* itself is not a single moment, and so a blaming encounter might be made up of a combination of theorized, open, or attended manifestations. Unfortunately, there is not space here to work through these issues.

There is another difficulty that arises here and which will occupy us for much of the next two sections. In a way, it is to take a step back. How is it that I construct a theory of blame and how do I utilize it?

First, I will consider a formal theory of blame, focusing closely on its construction and then possible application; next, I will consider what informal theories of blame might be like. Finally, I will tie all these points together, from our considerations of formality and informality, theorized and attended blame, and the construction and potential application of these theories to see if we can identify the *place(s)* at which problems might arise.

## **2.3 A Formal Theory of Blame**

### **2.3.1 Analysis of the Theory**

It is notionally apprehending propositions that facilitates the construction of a formal theory<sup>47</sup> of something. Science and philosophy often consist of formal ways of apprehending. In philosophy, much of my method consists of making distinctions, of classifying things, of seeing how some things relate to other things, and so forth. With technical and precise language, I can pull apart the mysteries of experience and place them into neat categories. Ideally, this will mean that as I experience the world, I can understand it better. In many cases, the

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<sup>47</sup> It is worth being clear that on my presentation, “formal theory” is redundant since what it means to be a theory is essentially just to be formal; however, given that this is an idiosyncratic usage, I will retain the redundancy for the sake of clarity.

way that I will go about this is by considering my experiences or constructing examples and questioning them. You might do the same thing, and then I can question your examples and you can question mine, and together we can see if one of our theories gets closer to the truth or not of the world as we experience it. What is particularly noteworthy, though, is that when I reflect on these experiences, I take them in this form of notional apprehension. I look to the experiences in order to pull things apart, to abstract generalities. I see the experiences theoretically so that I can construct a theory or paradigm, which is a formal representation of the results of notional apprehension.

What would an account, theory, or paradigm of *blame* look like? How would I convey it? Hanna Pickard has fortunately provided us with an insightful and concise example in an article on irrational blame.<sup>48</sup> To be clear, her purpose within this article is to focus on irrational blame as an important part of any account of blame. However, as she finishes her discussion on the irrational elements, she provides the useful clarification that what she calls “affective blame” can also be rational and then gives a description of this:

Ideally rational affective blame involves a complicated set of conditions: the blamed must be blameworthy and so justly deserves a hostile, negative response; the blamer must judge them blameworthy; blame must be appropriate to the circumstances; blame must not actively undermine rational ends (even if it is too taxing, even given an ideally rational blamer, to demand that it always serves them); finally, the nature of the particular hostile, negative emotions and manifestations thereof

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<sup>48</sup> Hanna Pickard, “Irrational Blame,” *Analysis* 73, (2013), pp. 613-626, doi:10.1093/analys/ant075.



constitutive of any instance of blame must be fitting and proportionate to the particular conditions obtaining, in kind and degree. Unless no one is ever blameworthy for a global reason... then these conditions, complicated as they may be, can be met in practice. Two adults of equal standing are in a relationship. One harms the other, substantially, and without excuse. The other knows this, gets angry, and expresses the anger appropriately, because they wish to stand up for themselves and feel entitled to be angry given what the other has done: they deserve it. Rational affective blame is part of our interpersonal lives.<sup>49</sup>

Pickard gives us two primary elements in her brief account: a set of conditions and then an example intended to show that the conditions can be met in practice.<sup>50</sup> If I were to give a longer account of the sort which Pickard has given us an example, I would take the conditions one at a time and then use examples to explain why each condition is the case, why other possible interpretations are incorrect, and so forth. So the giving of the conditions of blame will also include numerous examples, many of an abstract, third-personal type, such as "To say X is blameworthy for A is to say that X is liable to blame for having done A"<sup>51</sup> or "A person who has committed X-type wrongful acts is certainly able to meet the warrant requirement for responsible blaming,"<sup>52</sup> or Pickard's own example which I will return to shortly.

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<sup>49</sup> Pickard, "Irrational Blame," 624-625.

<sup>50</sup> This is, indeed, a consistent method I have observed in essentially every treatment that seeks to give an account of blame including all those referenced within this essay.

<sup>51</sup> Gideon Rosen, "Skepticism about Moral Responsibility," *Philosophical Perspectives* 18, (2004), 295-313, p. 296.

<sup>52</sup> Marilyn Friedman, "How to Blame People Responsible," 276.

If I keep in mind the nature of a theory and the process of apprehending notionally, I can see why using concrete examples is important.<sup>53</sup> I encounter some experiences, or I reflect on some experiences, and then I have a notion of something that sticks out as the way things should or shouldn't be. Let me take Pickard's first condition as an example. I may think to myself, in situations I have participated in or observed, in order for blame to be rational and justified – especially when there is a negative response involved – the person being blamed must actually be blameworthy. I find it unfair or wrong if someone blames me for something that I am not blameworthy for and I have often felt that it is wrong to blame someone else for something if I know they are not blameworthy or after I find out they are not blameworthy. In doing this sort of reflection, perhaps a feeling of what I am trying to express is there,<sup>54</sup> but if I want more than just an impression of this idea, perhaps I reflect a bit further on some concrete situations. I try to think through times I have been blamed or blamed others and interrogate those instances and how they relate to this notion that has come to mind. More

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<sup>53</sup> There may be a potential issue on whether or not some of these examples really classify as “concrete,” particularly in philosophical examples; in many cases, they read more like carefully constructed scenarios that line up with our philosophical concerns rather than *real concrete things in the world* (which you could think of as accurate real-life examples conveyed in all their worldly messiness or perhaps a really good story). Are the abstract, bland, and detail-less examples we use really close enough to what we experience in the world to be useful or *true*? Unfortunately, this is its own problem and we cannot go into it in detail here.

<sup>54</sup> It's important to realize that there is great difficulty in capturing propositionally the way in which these sorts of thoughts develop; usually there are vague notions, feelings, and intuitions that lead us along the way of thought. However, in trying to write it out, I am already making things more explicit than they usually are at first.

than likely, if I start on this sort of “train of thought,” the original idea regarding the blamed actually being blameworthy is probably not as propositionally distinct as what I have conveyed here. I may not have known when starting to work through the ideas exactly what I was trying to understand. Regardless, once I have started working through some instances of blame, at some point either in conversation or in writing, it may be possible that I am able to formulate the precise thought: “Ideally rational affective blame involves a complicated set of conditions: [one of which is that] the blamed must be blameworthy and so justly deserves a hostile, negative response.”

To be clear, this is just my own interpretation of the process of arriving at a condition like this, and your experiences may vary to some degree. At root, though, the idea is something like having an experience or an intuition that starts a process of thought in which ideas and concrete examples are compared with each other until I can arrive at some formulation of a condition which seems to closely cohere with as many conceivable experiences as possible. If I continue in this process, I can try to utilize this analytical procedure for blame itself, seeking to provide as many accurate conditions as possible. To construct any of these conditions, to give any sort of definition, I must have some concrete experiences from which to abstract generalities (if I have any hope of the conditions being remotely accurate), and I must apprehend them *notionally*.

First, though, I must have some encounter, some *experience*, that is concrete (though it's not necessary that I actually *see* the experience in a *real*

way). If the experience happened *to* me, then the nature of being in the world puts me in a good position for things to be really apprehended,<sup>55</sup> since the world is before me and I have the chance to be present and open to my experiences, to see them as they are and for what they are.<sup>56</sup> It is worth pointing out, though, that it need not only be my own experiences, but also the experiences of others, at least so far as they are conveyed as experiences (primarily stories and narrative).

Having these concrete experiences at hand, I can then *see* them notionally.

By then apprehending these things notionally, I can begin the process of

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<sup>55</sup> In the case of personal encounters (or issues like blame which are inter-personal issues), these would potentially be second-personal encounters. For now we can conceive of a second-personal encounter as an encounter between two persons in which there is room for the “I-you” address to take place. This is in many ways something of an extension or intensification of the first-person.

<sup>56</sup> Obviously there’s a lot going on in something like this. It’s not immediately evident what all sort of criteria might be relevant for the encounter to be real in this way, to be experienced in this way, or to be a second-personal encounter, and so on. For now, this can be thought of in terms of the extremes: there may be situations in which I am in the world and the experience is happening before me but I am not really *present* or *in* the experience. For instance, I am distracted by technology, or thinking about my own problems, and so forth. So even though the opportunity for an experience is before me I am not open to it in the relevant ways. Even further, I may be present, may be paying attention, but I might be paying attention in a *theorized* way, that is, I’m thinking about your personality type and the different qualities you have that fit you into some category, or I’m trying to search for informal fallacies in your argument or think of a rebuttal, or I’m looking at a butterfly and trying to visualize how the different parts of it work together, or I’m watching a sporting event and trying to assess the likelihood that one team or the other will win by analyzing the moves made so far or the mental state of the competitors, and so on.

What is noteworthy then in these examples is that these are ways of having experiences before me but not apprehending them really. In the cases of not being present my attention is not on the things outside of me that constitute the experience in the first place. In the theorized cases (which exhibit notional apprehension), I am proceeding into notional apprehension of the experience before really having a chance to apprehend really.

And so having experiences does not immediately imply real apprehension since this apprehension is a certain way of being in or seeing the experience.

constructing the theory. But, again, once I begin doing this, the experiences are no longer the same thing as they were before. Apprehending notionally or really are not neutral things since part of notional apprehension is to divide the concrete into parts for the purpose of analysis and the production of rules, generalizations, and so forth. Even more relevant is the reality that we do not generally do this on the basis of *one* experience, but of multiple experiences. Otherwise, I do not really have rules and generalizations but just an experience of the way it happened that one time. Let's call this the *problem of shifting viewpoints*.

Additionally, in doing these things I am relying on something else in the analysis: self-knowledge and knowledge of others. This point pertains most specifically to the concrete situations on which I am reflecting and from which I am drawing conclusions. Actual instances of blame are temporally bounded, inter-personal (even when it's me with myself), and concrete. A blaming situation happens to me, I am in it. When I am in it, there are things within me that are going on, there are mental states, emotions, awareness of what is around me, awareness of the person whom I am blaming, and so on.

When I am trying to construct my theory, in order to properly interpret this situation, I have to reference these concrete blaming experiences in which I

am relying on forms of what might be called personal knowledge,<sup>57</sup> and then leverage my experiences and the personal knowledge into an abstract analysis of blame *as such* (or a paradigm instance). In order for this process to happen correctly, my knowledge of myself and of the other is critical. However, what is noteworthy, is that this may go wildly awry in many cases, and usually, I believe, because we are not *seeing* the other or ourselves in the right way. Let's call this the *problem of knowledge*. We will return to both of these problems further on. Let's say – for the sake of moving things forward – that I overcome these problems in generating a theory and I have a set of conditions like Pickard's, what can I do next with my analysis?

Pickard's answer (and, implicitly or explicitly, that of most other accounts of blame) is that while such a set of conditions might be complicated, the conditions "can be met in practice." What might I mean in saying such a statement? Does this mean "in practice" in the sense that as I encounter the world I can carry my set of conditions for ideally rational affective blame with me and employ them in any instance of blame, whether I am issuing or receiving the blame? What would that look like? To be extremely efficient, perhaps I could write out a notecard or scrap of paper with the conditions written out and neatly numbered. Then, when I notice that I am in a blaming situation, I stop and assess

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<sup>57</sup> I will expand a little bit more on this in the following section. For a recent and insightful account of non-propositional and personal knowledge, see Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially chs. 3-4.

the notecard so I can ensure that I am being ideally rational. So long as I am, I can blame without fear of error. This might be one way to use the theory *as a theory*. Now, you may object that this is far too literal of an interpretation, that the right interpretation is something more like internalizing the conditions. I will address this further below, but suffice it to say that it seems that internalizing the theory might plausibly turn it into something concrete or at least different from the theory, in which case the point remains: if “in practice,” means using the theory as a theory (or, in other words, in a strictly or narrowly propositional way), it must mean using the theory as a series of propositions and applying the propositions to concrete situations.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps something else is meant. Perhaps all I mean by saying that the conditions can be met in practice is that I can think of a scenario in which all the conditions might be met in an instance of blaming. Pickard, intentionally or not, suggests this to be the meaning by immediately giving an abstract, third-personal example about two un-named adults in a relationship. Let’s look at this scenario one more time:

Two adults of equal standing are in a relationship. One harms the other, substantially, and without excuse. The other knows this, gets angry, and expresses the anger appropriately, because they wish to stand up for themselves and feel entitled to be angry given what the other has done: they deserve it.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Here, “proposition” means the narrower logical sense rather than the Newmanian sense.

<sup>59</sup> Pickard, “Irrational Blame,” 624-625.

Two concerns that seem relevant here are that this perspective on the application of the theory is both backward-looking and exceedingly vague.<sup>60</sup> By backward-looking I mean that this interpretation of the conditions being met in practice only says that I can use the conditions as an analysis of blaming situations *that have already happened* and retrospectively analyze whether or not they were appropriate instances of blaming. This seems problematic since it is not obvious how the theory would apply to concrete experiences and situations<sup>61</sup> (this is the other side of the *problem of shifting viewpoints*); this backward-looking analysis, then, is still disconnected from my experience in the world.

By saying that this interpretation of “in practice” is exceedingly vague, I mean that the situation includes almost none of the intricate and complicated details that make up even the most basic of actual blaming situations.<sup>62</sup> All of the

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<sup>60</sup> It is worth noting that while Pickard’s example here is truncated due to her purposes in her paper lying elsewhere, this sort of example is extremely common in the literature: the author gives a brief example intended to represent a potential blaming situation that purports to *show* the theory of blame given is accurate. For another example, George Sher in his work *In Praise of Blame* does this throughout, particularly in chapter six, “What Blame Is.” He “tries out” the various conditions he wishes to put forward by giving a “John and Mary” example designed to illustrate that the conditions can be met in practice, that is, that there is at least one example we can give which illustrate the accuracy of the theory.

<sup>61</sup> More on this below.

<sup>62</sup> Arguably, philosophical methodology will struggle with this by necessity; it is only through well-written fiction that we might get closer to some of the complexities of real life. Perhaps, and yet, it seems relevant that we should grapple with this *as a problem* more directly. If this is a necessary shortcoming of our theories of blame (and perhaps many other theoretical models), we need to be clear about the nature of the shortcoming, how it comes about, and when it comes about (which *are* things it seems we can address philosophically to some extent). On the other hand, perhaps it is through a deeper incorporation of literature into philosophical methodology that we might make some progress towards addressing this as a problem.



challenging details have been determined for us in the scenario (and we're not told how they are discovered). We know that whatever was done constituted "harm," was "substantial," and was "without excuse." These are all challenging details to ascertain in their own right, but even further the other person knows these details about the intention of the "harmer," and is appropriately angry (however that might be defined). On the grounds of the knowledge and the appropriate anger, the "harmed" apparently blames appropriately here. But determining all of these kinds of details is among the most difficult parts of a concrete experience of blaming, and this problem brings up our considerations of self-knowledge and knowledge of others again. It is not immediately obvious that we have access to answers of this sort in a blaming situation, and the process of getting answers to these sorts of questions is part of the problem of blame itself. Saying the theory applies *if* we already know all these answers circumvents a significant number of the issues involved with blame; but beyond this, it illuminates a place where there might be a gap between the theory and the instances of blaming that arise in my life. This problem is not just a problem for this understanding of "in practice" on Pickard's account, but is a general problem for blame, so we will call this the *problem of complexity*.

Now, I can perhaps excuse Pickard herself here, since this account of blame is only meant to be a clarification and is clearly intended to be brief and general. Nonetheless, this sort of presentation is not unique to Pickard. Many of the accounts in the literature give their conditions, definitions, and so forth, and

then give some example like the one above as a sort of validation that the author's criteria can be met "in practice" (I gave an additional example of this above in footnote 59). If the example is meant to validate the phrase "in practice," then the "in practice" appears to only mean a possible scenario can be envisioned. But this sort of "in practice" does not obviously or sufficiently connect to how I must live my life in the world – this "in practice" does not tell me how the theory leaves its abstract theoretical form and becomes applicable to instances of blaming in which I participate.

Perhaps there is another meaning intended by this "in practice." Maybe what is meant is that by reflecting on the conditions, the criteria, etc. then these criteria become somehow internalized, and I *become* an ideally rational blamer. I haven't just memorized the conditions, but I have meditated on them, believe them fully, taken them as real *for me*, as *my own*. I have become changed by the theory. No longer are there abstract rules and conditions, but an ideally rational blamer *in concreto*. But what could this mean? This still does not answer the question of *how* the theory is translated from a theory into something applicable in the world. What would it mean to say that I have internalized the theory? Would it still be *the theory* at that point, or something else? If something else, what? What is "internalizing" and how does it change the theory? What is it that the theory becomes once it is internalized?

One way of conceiving of this might be something like envisioning a situation in which I have so thoroughly reflected on and worked through the

parts of the theory that it becomes a solid part of my world view, something from which I act without having to mechanically go through the points of the theory any more. This might fit the term “internalized,” but it does not obviously overstep any of the problems with the theory. Being an embodiment of the theory doesn’t obviously mean that I am able to do anything more than generalize further from the theory to new situations; the point remains here that the new situation is still necessarily different in some way from the theory. Furthermore, as I will unpack further below and especially in “Pathologies,” this internalization of the theory does not secure me from any of the problems of theorized blame and, rather, may actually further problems related to theorized blame.

### **2.3.2 Expanding the Concerns**

When it comes to the construction of the theory, the conditions and criteria, and so forth, I noted a few issues. If I need to take first my experiences and then pull out generalities from them, then I have to consider what the experience is like. First, there will be numerous things going on within me as well as many things that I will be experiencing from the person I am blaming. For my purposes the question is how I would come to know these things. This is the *problem of knowledge*.

It seems most common within the analytical tradition to focus on propositional knowledge when considering the things one can know and how to

interact with them. However, it has been acknowledged that there are other forms of knowing things, such as acquaintance knowledge or know-how knowledge.<sup>63</sup> In her work *Wandering in Darkness*, Eleonore Stump makes a sustained argument for a form of non-propositional knowledge which she refers to as personal knowledge.<sup>64</sup> In brief, one can think of personal knowledge as the sort of knowledge that I might have in personal encounters and that cannot be reduced to propositional knowledge. Stump's argument is in part that narrative can capture something closer to the essence of the knowledge known in knowledge of persons, but propositional accounts are not fit for the task since the very things I am trying to encapsulate (personal encounters) are by definition not strictly propositional (or, not reducible to propositions).

One further consideration before returning to the issues surrounding blame is to address again the issue of self-transparency. It is sometimes, perhaps often, the case that I do not fully know myself. I sometimes get angry or sad or make decisions or any other number of things without being fully cognizant of my reasons or motivations. This is not to say that these things are undiscoverable, but only that I sometimes do not know why I am doing what I

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<sup>63</sup> For an early treatment, see Bertrand Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 11: 108-128; more recently and in summary, Ali Hasan and Richard Fumerton, "Knowledge by Acquaintance vs. Description," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/knowledge-acquaindescrip/>>.

<sup>64</sup> Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, particularly chs. 3-4.

am doing and also sometimes do not know that I do not know why I am doing what I am doing.<sup>65</sup>

If we fit this onto the model we've been laying out so far, we can note a few things. Personal knowledge is knowledge that I can obtain when I apprehend *really*. In a blaming encounter, many things could be going on. To the extent that I am apprehending really, I may be open to personal knowledge — that is, things about the other and myself that are not strictly propositional. If personal knowledge is not propositional, I will run into some issues here. To the extent that this instance of blaming is part of expanding my theory of blame, how do I fit the personal knowledge elements into the theory? If I reflect on the encounter, including the personal interaction, I will gain something — data points and propositions that can be easily placed into something formal, but this doesn't exhaust the content of the personal knowledge.

Now we return to the *problem of knowledge* and blaming encounters. In these instances, I need to know things about myself and others in order to understand what is going on, to determine the "facts of the matter." But if I am not always self-transparent, then I may sometimes not know my own reasons or may not *fully* understand my reasons, and, more importantly perhaps, I may not realize that I don't understand my reasons. Furthermore, to the extent that I do know my reasons or have apprehended the other, there are portions of what I

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<sup>65</sup> I will assume this without further defense for the sake of brevity.

know in this blaming encounter which may be in the form of personal knowledge and not strictly propositional. If I am not always self-transparent, and the knowledge of my personal encounter is not strictly propositional, then there will be barriers or problems in my later reflection when I am trying to take the commonalities or generalities from these experiences and put them into a theory.

A separate but related problem that I pointed to was that the experience of blame that I have (or receive) is a concrete occurrence – this is the *problem of shifting viewpoints*. The blaming encounter is something unique and real and in the world. I experience the blaming encounter. The theory I construct is not concrete but abstract; it is a propositional composition (notionally apprehended) that I make based on pulling out commonalities from multiple instances, on trying to discern necessary and sufficient conditions, or on trying to determine what is *essential* to something. These two things – the concrete and abstract – are different in kind, and not just degree. Again, like the *problem of knowledge*, the argument is not that the relation between concrete and abstract creates an impossibility of going from one to the other. I explained in the opening of the previous section that it is a natural and important process for one to construct accounts, theories, and so on – for one to have a theory. However, one way in which blaming is different from my experience of a chair is that blame is essentially inter-personal. What I am trying to show is that it is not immediately clear how I can get from the concrete to the abstract without losing some of what was known in the original encounter. In the abstraction, I lose part of the

experience, necessarily. This is because I am not aggregating all of the experiences, but pulling out the overlapping features and creating some new idealized version that is intended to reflect the experiences *as such*. The importance of this realization is that the formal theory is now at least one place removed from experiences in the world. And that is assuming that I accurately understood the instances in the first place, which are, again, far more complex than I may at first realize (*problem of complexity*).

I must also realize that in constructing the theory, I don't do this process of shifting viewpoints once, but over and over again. I encounter more and more instances or construct more and more examples and then have to properly understand them as real instances of the world, accurately assess the key elements, and then begin pulling out the relevant features or conditions, each of which may be complicated and nuanced.

Now, let's suppose again I have my formal theory, I have my set of conditions. What next? As before, this is the second part of the account from Pickard: I try to relate the theory to "practice." If I take the first possible interpretation, which is a more strictly propositional perspective – taking the theory and trying to apply it *as a theory* – then I am now trying to apply the idealized account to new concrete experiences in the world. Perhaps this could work with some limited efficiency, but it is not at all clear that the theory is equipped to handle all of the numerous (perhaps infinite) complexities of my experiences in the world. Each new instance of blaming is its own thing: I am

subject to particularized emotions and thoughts; whatever line has been crossed is its own instance of line-crossing; and the other person is their particular self with all the relevant complications that entails and to which I have even less access than my own non-transparent self.<sup>66</sup> Blaming encounters provide an opportunity for a second-personal interaction, real apprehension, and personal knowledge.<sup>67</sup> Assuming for a moment, the interaction happens in this way, the theory as theory model would require that we lose nearly all of what is unique about those things. I take those experiences, then I reflect on them, turning notional apprehension to the experiences, and I create a formal theory of blame. Then I must essentially disregard anything “leftover” and implement the theory in its theoretical form.<sup>68</sup>

Now, assuming that the blaming encounters do not provide the second-personal interaction, allow for real apprehension, or produce personal knowledge, I am only left with notional apprehension and propositional content

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<sup>66</sup> There is a possible objection here, which might be something like “Why are ‘types’ or ‘categories’ of blame not comprehensive or detailed enough to handle our blaming encounters *with sufficient accuracy* that the outliers are acceptable?” That is, could I not construct enough types of blaming or forms of blaming or paradigms or such that my theory is robust enough to handle the experience of the world? We will address this in detail in “Pathologies.”

<sup>67</sup> There are many reasons this might not occur, but I think that to the extent that these are not occurring there are more problems, not less.

<sup>68</sup> This also will tie into our treatment of theorized blame, which is coming later in this chapter. In brief and in preview, applying the theory as theory seems to force me to view the situation theoretically. If all I have in the encounter *is* the theory, then all I can do is see in a theorized way. And so, by theory as theory blame, I mean entering blaming situations without being able to apply any non-theoretical considerations (at least at the extreme; it seems unlikely that we could consistently act out this concept of theory as theory blame in this extreme of a way).



from the start. So there is little work in moving from this to implementing the theory as theory. Another possibility is that I do not have many of my own experiences, or I have simply not paid enough attention to them to have anything to work with, and so I receive the theory from somewhere or someone else.<sup>69</sup> Even more so now am I forced into utilizing the theory as theory. It can still be a formal theory here, it's just not *my* formal theory, that is, I didn't formalize it. Importantly, none of this entails that I cannot figure out how to blame properly (or sufficiently) or be properly blamed, but it does suggest that an idealized theory may not be appropriate for the situation – at least not *as a theory*.<sup>70</sup>

If I take the second understanding of theory – the one in which the theory only implies that *there is a possible world in which the conditions can be met* or, more charitably, that I can retro-actively assess blaming scenarios – then there are still problems. First, I still have the *problem of shifting viewpoints*. I still have to figure out how the abstract theory accurately maps onto the new blaming instance, and perhaps adjust it accordingly. But even more importantly, this theory is significantly limited in utility. If I can only apply it in a backward-looking way, then it seems I am simply at the mercy of the moment in all my actual blaming encounters – I am at the mercy of fate. My theory cannot prepare me for real-world encounters, which is also a corollary of the *problem of complexity*, which

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<sup>69</sup> I will treat on this kind of consideration in more detail in the following section on informal accounts of blame.

<sup>70</sup> More on the problems of theory *as theory* will be elaborated further on.

arises here as in the other instances. This understanding, then, simply doesn't do what an account or theory of blame should be able to do for me, which is help me live my life in a better way.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, if I take the third understanding of theory, it seems that I now finally have something potentially forward-looking: I can internalize the theory of blame and am thus equipped (or have become one who is able) to appropriately (though probably not perfectly) encounter situations of blame. Above, however, I suggested that even this concept of "internalization" doesn't seem to solve any problems. One question of course relates to what it would mean to *internalize* the theory. Based on the preceding considerations, it seems that what is needed is that I have a way to translate the propositional and abstract deliverances of the theory into something non-propositional and concrete as I am experiencing the world. It does seem that I do this to some extent in practice, since I am able to take things that I have learned and categorized in theoretical models (formal or informal) and apply them to the world. Is this doing anything other than using the theory as a theory, though?

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<sup>71</sup> So there's a possible response to this: Even though the theoretical model of blame doesn't help me blame in the world, it does help me understand blame and blameworthiness better in a general way. And this knowledge that I get about blame can then help me be a better blamer. But again, this misses the point – how? This is still suggesting that at some point the *results of the theory* come back around and enable us to be better blamers in our blaming encounters, but it's not clear this happens very often in practice or whether or not this efficiently addresses the problems that arise in our blaming encounters.

In many cases, this is nothing more than the ability to generalize. If all we are doing is efficiently and smoothly generalizing out of a theory which has become “internalized” or “embodied” then it is not clear that we are doing anything different yet than using the theory *as a theory*. In this case, the theory is just so deeply within me that I may not need to consciously reflect on the individual points. I just blame in accordance to the norms and the theory from extended exposure and reflection on the theory. Now, to be fair, this is not necessarily or always a problem; certainly, having a good theory and being able to generalize allows us to solve many problems and would improve our blaming encounters.

However, one thing to continually keep in mind is that our encounters with other persons are not the same as our encounters with things in the world. To the extent that there is a special ethical level of concern (and perhaps a sacredness) to persons and thus our encounters with persons, it is not obvious we can relate theories and persons together in the way we might relate theories and things.

There are two significant reasons that this is still not sufficient, and these reasons are the point of the thesis: First, the literature on blame presents formal theories as being set up to *solve* the problem of blame (or at least to move in this direction asymptotically), but it’s not clear that all of the problems lie in the theories or that the theories can always track on to real situations. The implication (which we will unpack further in “Pathologies”) is that theories of

blame still leave us open to pathologies of blame, in which case the problem may not be well classified as “solved” simply because we have a good theory or even the best theory (assuming this is possible, which I believe is not and cannot be the case). Second, and I will argue for this more shortly, the *over-emphasizing* of the theoretical way of thinking (constructing theories) seems to open us up to – if not facilitate – the theoretical way of seeing (theorized blame), which is a fundamental source of pathological blame. Theorized blame is already a problem separately from a theory – that is, account-holders of blame can engage in theorized blame – but it is worth being clear about how theory relates to this insofar as theories of blame are presented as ways of trying to address and resolve pathological blame.

So where does this lead me? I am trying to focus on two primary problems, but they interweave each other in complex ways. The first element is that the method of constructing a formal theory is a process of notionally apprehending the world; this method is a way of making things abstract and general (i.e. putting things into propositional accounts); this is the *problem of shifting viewpoints*. The second element is that because blame is about persons, the *object* of this notional apprehension is a person, the blamed or blamer, which raises particular problems. On my analysis self-knowledge and the knowledge of others is not strictly propositional; to notionally apprehend the self or the other is to lose something essential to the experience and my knowledge of the experience as well as to potentially miss things that I didn’t know at all in the

experience; this is the *problem of knowledge*. But this analyzing in this way (notionally apprehending) is what I have to do to make the theory formal, and I do it over and over: I abstract from the experiences. Having assembled the theory, I then try to apply it in practice. Applying it like an abstract, notional theory, though—like a series of propositions—is to try to force the concrete (the blaming encounters I have) to fit into the non-real abstract shape that I have created.

Doing this application also opens the possibility (and likely encourages the possibility) for not taking persons *as persons*<sup>72</sup> in the blaming encounter since they must fit into my theoretical application. Even should I not be interested in applying my theory to new situations, these problems remain for analyzing previous situations, but now the theory lacks further utility as well. The way forward is likely still related to some sort of internalization but will also require a way of seeing the concrete situations I encounter as concrete (apprehending *really*). To blame appropriately means to take the experience and the persons involved as they are in their particularity and nuance, to be open to non-propositional elements happening in the experience.

So far, I have not yet made clear how all of this ties into theorized blame though I have tried to start connecting some of the threads. First, we will further

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<sup>72</sup> Though there is not sufficient space to develop this here, I consider seeing others as persons to be roughly consistent with seeing you as a unique unrepeatable source of value. For more on this, see John F. Crosby, "A Neglected Source of the Dignity of Persons," in *Personalist Papers*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004).

develop these considerations in relation to informal theories of blame and then I will attempt to tie everything together and point to how I think the problems in blaming encounters arise.

## 2.4 Informal Accounts of Blame

So what might an informal account of blame be like? Insofar as I have tried to show the process of generating a theory and its ramifications in practice for formal theories of blame, how is this different from an informal account of blame? The first clue is the shift of language from “theory” to “account.” This is more of a practical shift, a demonstrative shift, than anything else. Both terms *theory* and *account* are used to illustrate that there is some kind of structure or framework to how someone is seeing the world. By appending theory with the term “formal,” the point is to indicate that some amount of reflection and articulation are in place.<sup>73</sup> The theory-holder has intentionally worked through the details of her orientation towards the world. For our purposes, she has intentionally worked through the details of blame and blameworthiness. There is an articulation of the kinds of things which are blameworthy or not, and the ways in which blame can or cannot, or should or should not be leveled. She has articulated the propositions and reflected on them.

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<sup>73</sup> Not to be redundant, but this formulation is, again, a redundancy.

The informal, then, is going to entail the absence of these things. A sort of “pure informal” would be some framework in which there is neither articulation nor reflection. The account-holder has no explicitly articulated views about blame or blameworthiness and he has not reflected even on situations of blame from his past—let alone on any articulations of blame or blameworthiness. This, it seems, would be perhaps the state of some children or possibly some psychopathic individuals. It is doubtful that there are many with this sort of *pure* state of informal accounts of blame. Nonetheless, it is a helpful starting place.

From this conceptual starting place, we can at least imagine someone in the situation. She moves moment to moment through life, constantly trying to avoid reflection. She has to be in the present; even thinking of the future might result in some thoughts about how to orient herself towards future encounters which seems unavoidably to force reflection. So she encounters things as they arrive, always, never considering what has been or what will be. Now, to be clear, she won't have a purely informal view of the world. This seems impossible. Aside from some defect of memory or social cognition, to be in the world is to encounter things and have them become a part of your account of the world. My encounter with air or chairs or trees or bunnies or whatever else will automatically begin an account. At first simply as some anomaly, perhaps, some concrete *thing* that exists, but once there is more than one or even once I try to

understand the *parts* of that thing, the account begins because I am now apprehending notionally.<sup>74</sup>

Anyway, we are concerned with blame, so we will narrow ourselves to the supposition that she has as close to an informal account of blame as can be imagined. What this would seem to require is essentially no contact with other persons, or, at least, none that is remembered. If I am trying to live in the moment, perhaps building something, doing some form of artwork, taking drugs, or whatever else, I can keep myself from being in relation to myself to some extent – so far as the object of my apprehension is not on myself.<sup>75</sup> This is more difficult to do however if I come face-to-face with someone, or even if I engage with a well-created story. *A narrative or a person forces me into a certain kind of relationship. Why did she move her hand like that? Is she trying to give me a gift? Was that a compliment? Did I say something to upset her? And so forth. My presence before another – even if it is myself or God – initiates a category of*

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<sup>74</sup> To be clear, apprehending notionally is the process one would use to formalize things and construct a theory; however, to apprehend notionally as a generally process does not immediately necessitate this. Apprehending notionally is just seeing things in this abstract way, of “cataloguing” parts of things. This process does not immediately lead to the sort of rationally developed, reflected upon results that formalization does and which is the process of generating a theory. And so when I encounter multiple different chairs I am apprehending notionally in that I am generating some background account of chairs, but I’m not necessarily formalizing my account until I go deeper into the rationalizing and reflecting processes.

<sup>75</sup> In Buber’s terminology of the “I-it” and “I-you” relationships, we might be able to think of having an informal account of blame as requiring one to try as much as possible to be just an “I,” or in an “I-it,” relationship with everything in the world; it’s not clear that it’s possible to *actually* be in this state, but we can still conceive of something like this at an extreme. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), ebook.



blameworthiness. I can run from myself and I can run from God or my conscience, but it is difficult to run from any interaction with others.

So much for a pure informal account of blame, but there seem to be many gradations and varieties to how reflection and articulation manifest. First, we might have something like an “impression.” These would be feelings about something being blameworthy or about how blame should be enacted, but feelings which aren’t yet articulated in any rule or statement. Second, we might have impressions that find some form of articulation, such as in religious or political dogma. Most likely, we would no longer call these *impressions*, but they’re still not *my* articulations. These might have explicit “rules” or “categories” that can be expressed, but they lack reflection or a sense of being *mine*.

As a general point, articulation can be present without reflection because by *articulation*, I mean something like *a formulation of a category*, or a *proposition*. “I am blameworthy if I lie in these kinds of situations.” This is an articulation that might fit into my account.<sup>76</sup> Now, if my articulations are all the result of my own experiences, this would seem to increase the chances that my articulations are reflective. In general, the process of articulation itself requires some amount of

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<sup>76</sup> At what point does an informal account become a formal theory? There is no precise answer because these are not matters with strict lines of demarcation. Further, it’s the wrong question. These terms of formal and informal as well as theory and account are not meant to provide us with a set of diagnostic criteria – they are meant to give a rough framework for understanding the problems of theories of blame and theorized blame.

reflection – though, it is of course true that the *amount, scope, and complexity* of the reflection can vary significantly. It is noteworthy that many of our articulations about the world, especially in relation to blame and blameworthiness, may not be our own or fully based on our experiences.

In general, as a part of growing up, we will have some influence or many influences on us which tell us what is right and wrong – that is, what things are blameworthy. This instruction comes in the form of parents, educators, peers, counselors, pastors, and so forth. We are presented with already articulated items to fit into our account of blame and blameworthiness. Not only are we given the commands, but we are often exposed to the expression. Blameworthy individuals are treated in *this way*. This is particularly evident in religious and political contexts. I might learn the ten commandments, or what is sinful and what is not, and then it is displayed for me how to interact with those who are blameworthy. Or, I might be raised in a “conservative” or “liberal” home, and I am told which political figures are good, what values are important, how to interact with those with whom I disagree, and so on.

Even more complicated given what was just explained is that much of this is embodied. The “articulation” is not always propositional. Even what I noted above, “I am blameworthy if I lie in these kinds of situations,” is not always *how* the articulation arrives. In a religious home, something explicit like, “Thou shalt not lie,” might be provided, but in other cases it may be that we receive or witness punishment for lying, or we’re hurt by lying, and so forth. Then the

articulation is loose, but the *thing* is there – this feeling of the pain or wrongness of lying. Even if we never express it in our minds in a propositional statement, it would be strange to say we don't *know* it; this would probably fall under what is meant above by *impression*.

None of these considerations are limited to growing up, of course. All of this is continually reinforced once we're out of adolescence. Everyone around us continues to reinforce the informal account. Maybe it's the television and movies we watch, or still our pastors and parents, or our friend group. And so the informal account continues to build and be reinforced. Even without reflection (or much reflection) we will build up an informal account of blame and blameworthiness through these *impressions*. In political, religious, or philosophical contexts, the impressions may give way to articulations: rules and principles and maxims, and so forth.

Still, though, these things may exist without much reflection yet. How often do we ourselves, through some encounter, come face-to-face with a belief that is challenged? We realize that some thought about a blameworthy thing may not have been well-founded, or we didn't properly understand it, or it doesn't apply as widely as we thought, and so on. This can often happen through deciding intentionally to reflect on something, from an interaction with a person, or from some experience with good art. And then we must think it through, must compare what we have just experienced with the account we've been holding

without realizing it. And so, this illustrates the process which might occur in moving from the account to the theory.<sup>77</sup>

If we want to analyze informal accounts of blame the way we did formal theories of blame, we run into an immediate problem. Our first consideration with the formal theory of blame was to address how it was constructed. Informal accounts of blame are not constructed, though – at least not in the intentional sense *constructed* implies. Informal accounts of blame *happen* to us. They come into being from our experiences in the world. To construct an account is just to make it formal – to move it toward the formal theory. However, we can still consider what the problems of accounts of blame might be: namely, lack of articulation and reflection.

While in the informal account, I am still capable of apprehending really and notionally, the results of these viewings in the world are not yet developed. My notional apprehension has been in the background, (in the way seeing chairs has given me enough chairness to work with). So my viewing of blame and blaming encounters has given me enough blameness to function, but it's unrefined. I might have some scenarios I can remember or some impressions in the background, but nothing articulated or reflected yet. What this means is that in the blame encounter, the problems are a bit different. The *problem of shifting*

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<sup>77</sup> It is also worth being clear that having these theories are ways of generalizing and often of seeing in a notional way that are natural and have seemingly appropriate and necessary application. My argument is not that some having theories or even theories of blame is bad or wrong thing, but simply that it is insufficient in some critical way.

*viewpoints* does not arise, since the core of this problem is the movement to and from the abstract, which is the theory. Since there's no theory, the shift doesn't occur. However, the *problem of knowledge* and the *problem of complexity* both still arise, yet I have even less to help me here in the blaming encounter. I am even deeper in ignorance since I don't even know what I don't know or how complex the encounter is. I make decisions about blameworthiness in the way one might grope about in a dark cave; maybe I will stumble into a path toward daylight but the odds are against me.

The formal theory serves a key role in our blaming practices, then, in that it can serve to *ground* or *justify* blame (and perhaps this is the most useful aspect of the retro-active functions of theory). Furthermore, informal accounts of blame do not seem to be internalized in the right ways. Without reflection and articulation, it is not clear that the account of blame is really *mine*. Rather, as expressed above, the account of blame *happened to me*. It is in some sense *from me*, but not truly *of me*. I am directed by an informal account of blame more than I direct it.

Informal accounts of blame and formal accounts of theory are in opposition; they are polar. They both exist in relation to impression, articulation, and reflection as I have expressed them here.

## 2.5 The Problem of Theorized Blame

I have tried to show roughly two primary issues related to blame so far: first, there are problems related to the construction of an account of theory or blame; I have named these the problems of shifted viewpoints (which occurs in both directions, from concrete to abstract and from abstract to concrete), knowledge (which consists both in knowledge of others and self-knowledge), and complexity. These problems and their relation to the construction of an account or theory of blame will be addressed in further detail in “Pathologies” where I try to show more concretely how this problem really is a problem and the consequences it might have on our blaming encounters, especially in its relation to the second main problem of theorized blame. Second, there are problems related to the application of an account or theory of blame. Above, I have tried to start from the problem as it manifests within Pickard’s account and I have given three possible interpretations of “in practice”: theory as theory, theory as retro-active analysis, and theory as internalization. This is where the problem of theorized blame will now arise, given that theorized blame manifests not in the construction of the theory but in the application – the *encounter*.

I tried to show that these three ways of interpreting in practice were open to various problems, but there is an over-reaching problem that I think is at work when moving from accounts or theories of blame, to blame encounters generally. The foundation of that analysis was a concern that our theories or accounts of

blame have some relation to the world as we experience it. I have been presuming that the utility of our philosophical endeavors must have some relation to the world in which we find ourselves and to situations in which blame arises. To the extent that a formal theory of blame is intended to serve as a piece of knowledge – as a fully-articulated and consistent system – perhaps there is no problem. Perhaps there is a certain pleasure in creating something that seems coherent and intricate, almost like a work of art. But this is surely misguided for ethics. My primary concern in ethical matters is not whether I can create a coherent, powerful, rational, and intricate framework for something, but whether or not it is *true*. Whether or not it relates to the world in which I live. Whether or not it informs my ethical action or the things which concern me in second-personal interactions. If it does not, if it exists only as some rigid and defined abstraction in the sky – perhaps beautiful of a sort – but cannot reach me on the ground, then it is of no concern. It may have aesthetic interest, but it has no ethical interest. The theory must connect to the world, and it must connect in the right way.

The primary space of concern, then, for our formal theories or informal accounts, is how they will meet with blaming encounters in the world. When I bring my worldview to bear on the situation before me, what happens? Theorized blame is a way of viewing the blaming encounter. If I am enacting theorized blame, then I am viewing the other through the lens of my theory or my account. Obviously, much will rely on what the content of my theory or

account is. Informally, I may have some general impressions about blameworthy categories and how blame is expressed. To utilize this as theorized blame is to enter the experience and automatically apply these impressions. If I think certain features of personality or skin color or height or sex or backgrounds or whatever else entail a person to be a certain way, I view the other in light of that. If certain things are blameworthy, I view the other in that categorization. If I think certain things are always inexcusable, then the other is inexcusable before being heard. And so on.

These sorts of concerns follow for formal theories with the difference being that the rules and parameters are articulated and have been reflected on to some extent. Theorized blame consists in viewing the blaming encounter through our theory and *primarily* (or *only*) by our theory. If we were to conceive of a “pure theorized blame,” it would be a situation in which we allowed no new information related to our theory of blame to get through to us *in the moment of encounter*. This places a particular limitation on the encounter, especially in relation to the other person in the blaming encounter.

But theorized blame is not only blaming through our theory and primarily by our theory; there is a ramification that may not immediately be evident but has been briefly addressed above. To enact theorized blame in the encounter is to apprehend the encounter notionally. No act is a singular event, but rather some phenomenon that I compare to all my other experiences and classify according to how it relates to my account or theory. No person is a singular person, but rather



a person in abstract relation to my other notions of persons – I pull out any relevant features of her and she becomes a series of notions related to my other notions about persons.

Recall that notional apprehension occurs within the mind. Theorized blame is a way of taking parts of you or the encounter and pulling them within my mind. There I relate them to the theory or account to determine how the blaming encounter should unfold. If this is dominant within the encounter, what I am *not* doing is seeing *you* – you before me as a person. Even if I know things about your background, these things are separated from the person of you insofar as I've pulled them out from you to analyze them within my mind. All of this is not to say that we should not apprehend notionally within a blaming encounter – that would be going too far. But I am trying to draw attention to and clarify the nature of the theorized side of blame encounters.

So the blaming encounter becomes an analytical event. Like a detective, I classify relevant features and draw on the account or theory I have developed (or that has developed upon me), and I make conclusions about blameworthiness and blame. Now, what may not be apparent here is that this can happen almost instantaneously as well. Someone pulls out in front of me in traffic; I slam on the brakes, lay down on my horn; the other vehicle slows enough for the driver to flip me off through the open window; immediately within me, resentment and rage swells, likely in inverse relation to whatever capacity I have to respond to the driver.

In situations of this sort, we're limited in some ways by our inability to have a meaningful personal interaction with the other. The situation forces this brief and severely limited inter-personal contact. But our theory or account is ready to tell us what actions in the context of vehicular traversal are blameworthy or not and how to blame (even if it's only through flipping someone off, cursing, expressing my rage inside, angrily telling my spouse about this later, etc.). Theorized blame is essentially forced on us in this sort of situation because of its speed and the lack of opportunity for a genuine inter-personal encounter. There simply is no real opportunity for a deeper encounter to be had.

So now, back to our "in practice" concerns. Applying the theory as a theory, as a retro-active analysis, or as internalized all seem open to theorized blame as I have expressed it here. Utilizing the theory as a theory seems to be the most liable since we're halfway there (or more) from the start. By trying to apply notions to the blaming encounter, I'm nearly forced to apprehend the encounter notionally. Theory as retro-active analysis has no value for us in the encounter and thus is no concern. Theory as internalized, then, seems like the way we might most desire to utilize our theory but is not free of the problem of theorized blame. To the extent that internalizing the theory is something like "owning" the theory, having articulated and reflected upon it so that it is now embodied through me, this does not prevent me from seeing the blaming encounter in a notional way.

Let us say that I have fully worked through numerous ethical issues for myself, have thought through blame and blameworthiness, have reflected on my views and understandings of these things to the extent that they are just a part of how I see the world now. When a blaming encounter occurs, it seems I am in the best position to blame well; however, this need not actually work out this way.

Let's say there is college professor who teaches ethics. Ludwig is serious about his own character and has put considerable effort into trying to be someone who blames well and orients himself ethically in the world. He has meditated, taught, and reflected thoroughly on blame and blameworthiness. This particular day begins with a fight with his wife; not a relationship-ending fight, but a misunderstanding that leaves him unsettled and frustrated as he gets to campus. Once he is on campus he hears more about how the administration is looking to phase out some of his department's courses and reduce the number of philosophy professors in the department (purely out of consideration of student needs, of course). One of Ludwig's colleagues is having a difficult time from the loss of a family member; two others are under serious pressure to publish a paper before the end of the term. He makes a sincere effort to be there for them, to listen and encourage. When he gets to class, he runs into a number of technical issues with the sound and projector; as he's teaching he loses his train of thought multiple times and the students seem disengaged. He stumbles through the conclusion to the lecture and lets the students go. At this point, he's starting to feel weary of his day, and he's feeling frustrated and a bit off.

Finally, Ludwig finishes his day on campus and heads to the grocery store to pick up some last-minute things for dinner. Of course, this adds to his frustration as the store is out of his way and he just wants to be home. On the way, he gets cut off by another vehicle. Slamming on the brakes to avoid hitting the vehicle and nearly slamming on the horn, he just manages to hold his reaction in. *Maybe they didn't see me. It was probably just a mistake*, he thinks to himself and keeps going. Next, he gets to the store and they're out of two of the items, which forces him to look for alternatives online, text back and forth with his spouse, and ultimately delays everything. At this point, he's nearly exasperated. He nears the self-checkout, and just as he's nearly there something hits him. He goes off balance, dropping the basket and groceries. A jar of pasta sauce shatters and sends red flying everywhere, including all over him. He collides hard with the floor, taking the brunt of it on his left arm. As he glances up, he sees the culprit, a young man looking down at him with what appears to be a wicked grin. Without even thinking, Ludwig starts yelling, "What is wrong with you? Are you blind? Look at this!" and continues likewise, about the fall, the pain in his arm, the broken glass, and so forth. The young man tries to protest, tries to explain himself, but Ludwig can't even see him. Eventually, someone comes and helps clean up, and Ludwig checks out and goes home.

This is, on my view, an instance of theorized blame, and blame encounters of this sort affect everyone, even those who have sought to prepare themselves to blame well. It is in these sorts of situations we hear things like, "Well, I'm only

human,” or “We all make mistakes,” or “Everyone’s fallible,” and so forth. This is, of course, true, but it doesn’t elucidate anything.

What happens in the story is that the circumstances of the day, what is going on in my life, and the moment in which the blame occurs impact how I am able to interact with this other person in the blaming encounter. The phrase “but Ludwig can’t even see him,” is intentional, because this is what often happens. I’m focused on myself and all the things going on around me, and my pain, and the day, and so on, and it keeps me from seeing *you*.

In this scenario above, Ludwig’s perception is that the boy smiles wickedly, but these are the kinds of instantaneous perceptions that are subtle and sometimes (perhaps often) wrong. Maybe it was an awkward smile in the way we sometimes do when we’re uncomfortable or unsure what to do. Maybe the kid has a weird face that looks malicious when he’s not really feeling that way – who knows? Ludwig is not really *there* – not really present before the line-crosser.

Now, this is only one example. There are endless variations because there are endless blaming encounters with infinitely variegated individuals. This particular blaming instance has to do with how Ludwig’s day has gone and is from an ideally well-positioned blamer (in terms of background and formalization of theory). Perhaps disconcertingly, this is not the position of most individuals. Many of us have different conclusions about blameworthy behaviors or what might count as an excuse for certain behavior. We have different

considerations of whether or not your family background or personal experiences should play much of a role in your responsibility for your views. And then the blaming situations can be all sorts of things. I blame you for a joke in poor taste, or for making misogynistic comments, or for supporting some group I find morally problematic, or more seriously, I blame someone for murder or rape or genocide. All of these things effect the way in which I approach the blaming situation. The moral seriousness of the blameworthy action generally impacts how I view the perpetrator. Whether or not it seems at all conceivable to me that someone could do *this* will color my view of him.<sup>78</sup> And, all of these things, to greater or less degree, will shape how I see the blameworthy person in the moment of encounter.

This will also shape how I respond. Suppose someone finds a particular ethnicity to be blameworthy, for whatever reason. Maybe it's because the blamer thinks they're displacing another ethnicity, or there's a history of inter-tribal warfare and the stories of the atrocities the other has committed go back decades or centuries, or the blamer thinks those of this ethnicity are responsible for undermining the current society, and so forth. Supposing someone finds this to

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<sup>78</sup> It has been noted that there may sometimes be a problem of "pathologizing atrocity," by which it is meant that some actions seem so terrible that I begin to imagine only a terrible person could have done them (see John M. Doris and Dominic Murphy, "From My Lai to Abu Ghraib: The Moral Psychology of Atrocity," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, XXXI (2007): 25-55, p. 30). Regarding blame and our concerns here, then, the danger is that the nature of the line-crossing might too easily cause me to shift my perception of the line-crosser to fit my conception of the kinds of persons that could do these kinds of things. This is to no longer be open in the rights ways to see that person as the person that they really are.

be true, deeply believes in these things about the other ethnicity, then his encounters with others of that ethnicity will manifest in particular ways. Most notably, he will see them *as their ethnicity*, that is by an abstracted notion rather than as an individual. The blamer will see the other in relation to this abstracted quality, and the blamer will act out of the informal account or formal theory of blameworthiness he possesses.

And the consequences can be significant. This is why all of this is relevant. These are serious issues. They are not necessarily issues that can be solved by a comprehension of the construction of theories or theorized blame, but it may be that this is a start. In many of these cases, the problems can be seen as manifesting at either of these two places: the formation of the theory or the nature of the blaming encounter (though I am most concerned with the latter). We need to properly understand how the construction of the theory is not a fluid straight-forward process, as well as realize how significant the moment of encounter is.

Now, perhaps all of this has been too abstract still. You think, sure, there's some problems with constructing theories, but we do it all the time with reasonable success. Is it really a fatal flaw? Is it *that* serious? Perhaps you also think, sure, the blaming encounter is significant, and it matters how we see people, but is it that fundamental of an issue? What is it that I'm not getting in theorized blame that I need? Surely it's not world-changing?

In the chapters “Pathologies” and “Manifestations,” I will seek to address these questions. Here, I have sought to provide a framework for the problem, to illustrate the structures and forms of what is at stake. In the sections following the Interlude I will seek to clarify the relevance and significance of these concerns. Before that, however, we will return to our considerations of Rorschach and Ozymandias, as well as encounter a new character: Raskolnikov of *Crime and Punishment*.



## Chapter 3

### Interlude: Somewhere in the World

*Ernste Stunde*  
*von Rainer Maria Rilke*

*Wer jetzt weint irgendwo in der Welt,  
ohne Grund weint in der Welt,  
weint über mich.*

*Wer jetzt lacht irgendwo in der Nacht,  
ohne Grund lacht in der Nacht,  
lacht mich aus.*

*Wer jetzt geht irgendwo in der Welt,  
ohne Grund geht in der Welt,  
geht zu mir.*

*Wer jetzt stirbt irgendwo in der Welt,  
ohne Grund stirbt in der Welt:  
sieht mich an.*

*Solemn Hour*  
*by Rainer Maria Rilke*

*Whoever now weeps somewhere in the world,  
weeps without reason in the world,  
weeps over me.*

*Whoever now laughs somewhere in the night,*

*laughs without reason in the night,  
laughs at me.*

*Whoever now wanders somewhere in the world,  
wanders without reason out in the world,  
wanders toward me.*

*Whoever now dies somewhere in the world,  
dies without reason in the world,  
looks at me.*

### **3.1 The World, Unraveled**

Before we move on to Raskolnikov, it will be useful to further develop our consideration of Rorschach and Ozymandias in light of the developments in Encounters. What do Rorschach and Ozymandias' accounts or theories of blame and their application look like?

In the Prelude, I sought to lay out some of the contributing factors for Rorschach and Ozymandias in some detail. What we find in him is probably somewhere closer to the middle in terms of an account or theory. He has certainly reflected on a number of experiences and is conscious of categories of blameworthiness. The sequence in chapter six of *Watchmen* in which he details his transition from someone wearing a mask to actually *being* Rorschach consists of a new understanding about the nature of the world. He determines that there is no god or fate or other excuse for suffering: just humans hurting humans. And he's decided to do something about this. So, clearly, he's reflecting and trying to articulate problems.

At the same time, he does not formulate or develop these in as rigorous or clearly a way as might a philosopher, theologian, or someone seeking to express a neat list of criteria. He seems to have a number of right-leaning concerns from his childhood and upbringing that still color his judgments of blameworthiness in an un-reflective way (which is not of course to say that either right-leaning or left-leaning tendencies are good or bad; it's their unreflected nature here that is of concern).

Much the same can be said of Ozymandias. He goes on a journey throughout the world, consciously studying religion and philosophy, trying to understand the world. He is a self-consciously intelligent person, peering into the workings of the world and trying to understand how to fix its problems. Within the novel, we spend a lot less time understanding the particulars of his worldview, which is probably connected to preserving the coming revelation of his plan in chapter eleven of the story. More than likely, there is something more articulated and formulated in Ozymandias' way of seeing the world than what is revealed to us within the novel.

So, in these two heroes, we have one likely somewhere in the middle, maybe slightly on the theory side of things in Rorschach, and Ozymandias likely further along the side of theory. This is something like what we would expect from heroes, as they are in a position of power that seems to facilitate some

reflection on issues of blameworthiness and judgment.<sup>79</sup> Both Rorschach and Ozymandias, through their different experiences leading to and after becoming costumed heroes, have reflected to some degree on their views of blameworthiness and blame. What this looks like – the articulation and expression of these things – is what I was focused on trying to reveal within the Prelude.

In thinking about the application of theory, Rorschach seems to be very clearly in the theorized camp. This manifests in multiple ways throughout the story. In various places, there are references to Rorschach growing more distant after a certain point (likely after the sequence in which he shifts into actually *being* Rorschach). He begins to work on his own more and more. After vigilantism is outlawed, he is even more alone as he refuses to give up his work. So, at the point we encounter him at the beginning of *Watchmen* Rorschach is utterly alone in the world. He has no close friends or relations.

When the Comedian is murdered and Rorschach goes around to let the others he used to work with know about this, he is met with discomfort and awkwardness. He breaks into Daniel Dreiberger's house, the person with whom he'd previously been closest as heroes. Dan (who was Nite Owl) is apparently used to Rorschach's oddities, but is clearly distant from Rorschach. Their

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<sup>79</sup> It is of course not necessary; it is perfectly consistent that someone in a position of power (like law enforcement) might operate just in line with the enforcement of the law – that is, she might take the law as containing accurate articulations of blameworthiness even if it is not *her* articulations of blameworthiness or she has not reflected on these articulations.

conversation ends when Dan shows Rorschach out the back entrance. Rorschach says, "Yes. I remember. Used to come here often. Back when we were partners." Dan replies, "Oh. Uh, yeah... yeah, those were great times, Rorschach. Great times. Whatever happened to them?" Rorschach, who is walking away at this point, leaving, simply responds without turning back: "You quit."<sup>80</sup>

When Rorschach visits Jon and Laurie (two other former heroes), Laurie is clearly disgusted and upset by him. After an angry conversation regarding the Comedian's attempted rape of Laurie's mom, Laurie says to Jon, "Jon, get this creep out of here."<sup>81</sup> And, shortly after this, in conversation with Jon she says, "Yeah. I just don't like Rorschach. He's sick. Sick inside his mind. I don't like the way he smells or that horrible monotone voice or anything. The sooner the police put him away, the better."<sup>82</sup>

Certainly, when Rorschach is out in the world, he is often met with hostility and disgust. He shows a chilling lack of concern for others, or indicators that their presence or lives are noteworthy to him. In chapter six, when Rorschach is being interviewed by a psychiatrist, his face shows no emotion throughout. Every panel on these pages is just a neutral, almost bored expression. In chapter eight, while Rorschach is in prison, some other prisoners

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<sup>80</sup> Moore, *Watchmen*, 21.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

whom Rorschach had put away in the past, show up. One of them, a crime boss called Big Figure, is trying to break into Rorschach's cell to kill him. In the process, blood is spilled. There is a panel in which we see Rorschach looking out, not even at them, and blood from the scene is splashing onto his white t-shirt. It is a chilling picture of pure disinterest.<sup>83</sup>

The purpose of relaying these sequences is to sketch a picture of Rorschach as someone who seems to be already exhibiting difficulties in seeing others as persons in the first place. When he's out to get information, he just breaks people's fingers, seemingly without any qualms. Rorschach, then, primarily exists within the mode of theorized blame. His life revolves around making assessments of blameworthiness, looking for those who are doing something wrong, and then punishing them for it.

When he sees someone, he is not trying to see them as an individual, as a person, as a real thing in that moment with him. He has his theory about blameworthiness, and he is just looking for line-crossers. An instance of line-crossing, by its very nature, can only be an aspect of some person—a part of them. No instance of blameworthiness is sufficient to exemplify all of *who* a person is. But this is all that Rorschach can see.

This is probably most obvious in moments when the theorized mode is disrupted. One of these moments will be addressed in the Postlude but there is

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<sup>83</sup> Moore, *Watchmen*, 261.

another which may be useful here. At one point in *Watchmen* Rorschach is set up for a murder and imprisoned. While imprisoned his former landlady is interviewed and lies about him – including saying that he had propositioned her for sex multiple times (the truth is that the landlady is a prostitute, but Rorschach has not made any advances on her). Later, Rorschach escapes and returns to his home for his belongings.

Here, he runs into the landlady and her son and confronts her about the lies. Dan is with him and suggests he leaves it, but he responds, saying, “Can’t. Serious business. Slur on reputation.” He then turns his attention to her and says, “How much did they pay you to lie about me, whore?” She responds, saying, “Oh, please, don’t say that. Not in front of my kids... please. They... they don’t know.” With this last part, our view shifts to a shot of the kid by her side, tears running down his face as looks up at Rorschach with wide eyes. The next panel is Rorschach looking at the kid and no dialogue in the panel. The very next panel is Rorschach turning to leave and he says to Dan, “Got what we came for. Finished here now. Let’s go.”<sup>84</sup>

Rorschach’s initial response is quite consistent with his character as we know him. The landlady has crossed a line, has lied about him – smeared his reputation. She is blameworthy and Rorschach cannot let it go. When Dan tells him he should, he responds that he *can’t*. Which makes sense. When he makes

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<sup>84</sup> Moore, *Watchmen*, 320 (panels 3-8).

the comment about her profession, she makes the plea: not in front of the children. This changes things now. For one, it should remind Rorschach of himself. He was also raised by a single mother who worked as a prostitute. When the landlady says they don't know and draw Rorschach's attention to the child, it seems plausible to suggest that he is being reminded of himself. He has empathy. He understands something about the kid's perspective through his own perspective and past. This moment seems to jar him out of the theorized mode he'd been operating in immediately before. Interestingly, it is not seeing the landlady different that changes his blame toward her; it is seeing the kid. The kid is connected to her, though, and so he drops the blame he was about to level (who knows in what way). He lets go and he leaves. This is one of a very few moments where Rorschach is turned away from his theorized mode of viewing those around him.

When we find something chilling or uncomfortable in Rorschach, it seems to be just the dispassionate and expressionless way in which he goes about hurting and killing the blameworthy. Obviously, one problem that is going on here is that we would generally consider Rorschach's actions to be problematic just in terms of the actions themselves – killing and maiming others, regardless of the reason, is generally not appropriate conduct. We might say it exceeds the appropriate response to the blameworthy behavior.

While this is true, what I would like to also point to is what enables Rorschach to do this so easily. Rorschach can carry on in this way just because he



is looking at others in the theorized mode. For Rorschach, this way of seeing the world is so dominant that he seemingly struggles to see *anyone* other than in a theorized way. No one is really present to him as a person. Whether colleague or criminal, Rorschach sees everyone in terms of abstract concepts. He admires those who refuse to compromise, like the Comedian; he is ambivalent or slightly derisive toward the other costumed heroes that seem to have given up; and he punishes those who are line-crossers.<sup>85</sup>

The theorized mode is in many ways a convenient mode of seeing in the world, because it doesn't challenge us. I set my account or theory, and deconstruct others until they fit into them, then the account or theory tells me what to do. I don't have to be open, to be aware, to be surprised by the mystery or uncertainty of life. Indeed, this is a hallmark of theorized blame on my view: it manifests in a tendency to shape others to fit our theories rather than to see someone for who she is.

Ozymandias also fits into this theorized viewpoint, though it manifests somewhat differently. Ozymandias does not have the same off-putting nature that Rorschach has. He's an attractive, muscular, charming person who's been highly successful on multiple fronts, most recently, in business. Ozymandias is one who, from the outside, would appear successful and pleasant to be around.

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<sup>85</sup> We will address this again, but it is worth noting briefly here that I do not think the solution is as simple as "fixing" someone's theory.

However, something we also never see are any meaningful relationships in his life. His conversations are always with business associates and employees. His closest companion is Bubastis, a genetically engineered lynx.

He also acts much differently when he does act than Rorschach. Whereas Rorschach is on the street, night after night, trying to carve some meaning and sense into the world, Ozymandias has spent years constructing his plan and managing everything involved. There is very little to show in the day-to-day. It is a long-term, methodical plan. For all this, the scope is also much larger, seeing as Ozymandias' plan consists in orchestrating an event he intends to change the perception of the entire world and which will also take the lives of half of the inhabitants of New York City.

One thing we can immediately see is that there is seemingly an increased distance for Ozymandias from the consequences of his actions. He is able to sit in his office or his Antarctic research facility and plan things. He doesn't have to look any of the people he kills in the face, doesn't have to see their bodies. He evaluates nothing about them at all, never sees a single one of them as a person. They are tools. They are consequences. They are pieces on a chessboard, sacrificial pawns that Ozymandias believes will allow for a checkmate on the self-destructive tendencies of humankind. As Ozymandias says, "An intractable problem can only be resolved by stepping beyond conventional solutions."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Moore, *Watchmen*, 373.

Ozymandias knows perfectly that from an “ethical” perspective, this might look like the wrong choice. That it is a *bad* thing. However, in this particular case, it is still the *right* thing. The conventional solutions are insufficient. This is the only possible route forward. And, he has the resources and skill to carry it out.

Ozymandias announces at the end of chapter eleven that he has already carried out his plan. The deed is done. Half of New York City is gone. Rorschach and Dan (Nite Owl) struggle to believe it. However, in the opening of chapter twelve (the final chapter) we are shown the consequences. The clock which had been counting down to midnight throughout the entire novel (a multi-layered symbol in the story) finally reaches its end-goal, and then we see six full-page panels of the aftermath. The gory and destructive consequences are brought to the reader’s attention drastically.

However, later in this chapter, when Ozymandias, Rorschach, and Nite Owl finally turn the televisions on to see all the different reports, what Ozymandias hears and sees is only that the plan has worked. He doesn’t seem to notice the death and destruction at all. He hears only that the countries are coming to a ceasefire to orient toward this new threat; upon hearing this, Ozymandias throws his arms high and shouts, “I did it!”

Theorized blame manifests here in this eerie disconnect from any of the personal consequences. Even if Ozymandias doesn’t seem to be meaningfully holding each of these individuals accountable *as individuals* for any line-crossing,

he is still certainly executing a judgment, a sort of de-personalized punishment to a “representative weak person.” The theorized nature of his viewing of these individuals means that they have already been reshaped in order to fit into his view about the world. He has already decided the nature of the world, the rightness and wrongness that is relevant, the nature of blameworthiness. The people in New York City did not have to do any specific line-crossing because he is not seeing them as individuals at all who cross lines.

It is worth briefly detouring to connect some points of utilitarianism and criticisms of it in relation to these concerns of blame (especially given that Ozymandias seems to be operating with utilitarian – or at least consequentialist – criteria). In considering the greatest good for the greatest number, one mechanism which arises is the notion of the impartial, benevolent, and disinterested spectator.<sup>87</sup> Operative here is a stance in which it is not what is good or bad for any single individual which becomes my criteria for action. Building from this and other core ideas of utilitarianism, John Rawls expresses the following:

The most natural way, then, of arriving at utilitarianism... is to adopt for society as a whole the principle of rational choice for one man... It is this spectator who is conceived as carrying out the required organization of the desires of all persons into one coherent system of desire; it is by this construction that many persons are fused into one. Endowed with ideal powers of sympathy and imagination, the impartial spectator is the perfectly rational individual who identifies with and experiences the

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<sup>87</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, INC., 2007), 14.

desires of others as if these desires were his own... This view of social cooperation is the consequence of extending to society the principle of choice for one man, and then, to make this extension work, conflating all persons into one through the imaginative acts of the impartial sympathetic spectator. Utilitarianism does not take seriously the distinction between persons.<sup>88</sup>

What I would like to suggest here is that something similar might be said about blame. Whether this goes for utilitarianism generally I will say nothing presently, but at least on the picture we have presented of Ozymandias, it seems we can see at work a version of the conflation of persons. In this case, it is not a benevolent and disinterested spectator or an ideally rational desirer, but an ideally weak line-crosser. Just as not every individual need be seen as rational in the way the rational representative is, neither does every victim of Ozymandias' need be seen as weak in the way the blameworthy and weak representative is. Ozymandias is not taking seriously the distinction between persons, has conflated the individuals – has *reshaped* them – to fit into the theory. In the end, though, it won't be so bad. After all, their deaths will save the rest of the world.

## 3.2 Raskolnikov

Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov is the protagonist of *Crime and Punishment*. The story revolves around his decision to kill an “old crone” (a woman named Alyona Ivanovna) and the psychological ramifications of this

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<sup>88</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 23-24.

decision upon him. One of the fascinating aspects of the story is that at different points Raskolnikov gives different interpretations of his own motives. At some moments he thinks of the crime in terms of consequences, in terms of providing himself resources for helping himself, his family and others; at other times he thinks of it in terms of what a “great man” is allowed to do, of overstepping morality because he can. Concerning blame, I want to look at two different things: the first is Raskolnikov’s considerations in relation to Alyona, which exhibit a theorized view even if it seems less clear that the instance is one of “blame”; second, we will set the stage for considering the blameworthiness which Raskolnikov may be thought of as having incurred. However, fully addressing this second part will be of more concern in the postlude.

Let’s start with the thoughts about Alyona’s blameworthiness, first in the form it is relayed by two men whom Raskolnikov overhears. In the first section of *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov is wavering back and forth about this idea of killing the old woman (Alyona) and his repugnance at the idea. As all of these things are working through him, he overhears a conversation between a student and an officer which goes as follows:

“Kill her and take her money, so that afterwards with its help you can devote yourself to the service of all mankind and the common cause: what do you think, wouldn’t thousands of good deeds make up for one tiny little crime? For one life, thousands of lives saved from decay and corruption. One death for hundreds of lives – it’s simple arithmetic! And what does the life of this stupid, consumptive, and wicked old crone mean in the general balance? No more than the life of a louse, a cockroach, and not even that much, because the old crone is harmful. She’s eating up someone else’s life...”

“Of course, she doesn’t deserve to be alive,” the officer remarked, “but that’s nature.”

“Eh, brother, but nature has to be corrected and guided, otherwise we’d all drown in prejudices.”<sup>89</sup>

This certainly is influential on Raskolnikov’s thinking even though he will later reveal to Sonya the confusion regarding himself and his motives, including how these thoughts fit into things. What we have in this scenario by the student and the officer is very clearly a theorized view. The “wicked old crone” is not really before them as any sort of person, she is abstracted into some qualities, noticeably ones the two men find objectionable. She is then seen instrumentally, in terms of what she might allow to happen for others: her death could bring about “thousands of good deeds.” Recall that theorized blame is blame which views the other in the blaming encounter through notional apprehension. In this moment, the student and officer are not thinking about who the crone is, about her person-ness, or about any real connection between the two of them. They are thinking about the things she has done and she has been reduced to a “louse, a cockroach, and not even that much,” in their eyes – that is, not a person.<sup>90</sup>

As far as Raskolnikov’s own motives go, the clearest deliverance we get are the following words from Raskolnikov to Sonya:

I wanted to kill without casuistry, Sonya, to kill for myself, for myself alone! I didn’t want to lie about it even to myself! It was not to help my

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<sup>89</sup> Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 65.

<sup>90</sup> It is also worth noting how much more easily this happens when the person is not present before us, or when we have some excuse or reason to see the person as “other” or perhaps even “less than a person” (for instance, as a cockroach or a louse).

mother that I killed – nonsense! I did not kill so that, having obtained means and power, I could become a benefactor of mankind. Nonsense! I simply killed – killed for myself, for myself alone – and whether I would later become anyone’s benefactor, or would spend my life like a spider, catching everyone in my web and sucking the life-sap out of everyone, should at that moment have made no difference to me!... And it was not money above all that I wanted when I killed, Sonya; not money so much as something else... I know all this now... Understand me: perhaps, continuing on that same path, I would never again repeat the murder. There was something else I wanted to know; something else was nudging my arm. I wanted to find out then, and find out quickly, whether I was a louse like all the rest, or a man? Would I be able to step over, or not! Would I dare to reach down and take, or not? Am I a trembling creature, or do I have the *right*...<sup>91</sup>

So what’s the point of looking at this and looking at Raskolnikov’s motives? It’s not clear that this should fall under our rubric of “blame.” Indeed, it’s not clear that Raskolnikov *blames* the old crone, Alyona, for anything. To be fair, she is no random person. She is a pawnbroker that Raskolnikov sees as having cheated many people out of their money as well as enslaving her sister Lizaveta. Alyona, then, is certainly not without blameworthiness as far as many are concerned, including Raskolnikov. However, his motives in actually killing her are not quite this simple. Certainly, some part of it is his view of her and her actions, the influence of the student and officer who present the murder as somehow justifiable, Raskolnikov’s desire to provide for himself and his family, and Raskolnikov’s desires as expressed just above about wanting to dare to take. All of these things are likely at work to some extent here. People are complicated,

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<sup>91</sup> Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 419.



motives are messy and rarely clear-cut (the capturing of which is one of the beauties of Dostoevsky's writing).

There does seem to be a blaming element here, then, even if Raskolnikov may not relate his foundational motives as tied to the blameworthiness of Alyona. He certainly thought she was blameworthy in some ways (whether or not he views her death as directly related to his blameworthiness), and he never has any positive words to say about her. Nonetheless, what is most of significance here is not the relation of Raskolnikov's judgment of blameworthiness to his actions, but the way he is viewing the situation. What is stunning in the above passage is how Raskolnikov does not even mention anything about Alyona in his explanation of his motives. Even though other passages give us context about her relation to him and his opinions of her, when thinking about the motive of the violent actions he undertakes to end her life, he doesn't think about her at all. She never even comes into his consideration as a person; indeed, he refers to Alyona as a "louse" (a phrase the student had previously used with the officer when Raskolnikov overheard them).

What seems to be the case, then, whether we want to call Raskolnikov's actions those of "blame" or not, is at least a picture of what I might consider to be a theorized view. Raskolnikov's approach to Alyona and her murder is one in which she is just some abstract entity, less than human – she is identified by qualities about her: her enslavement of her sister, her miserliness, and so forth. She is not seen as a person, as a concrete entity in the world. When Raskolnikov

deliberates in relation to her, she is not *present* for him. There is no real experience that exists between them as persons. Instead, he views her through his theory, his understanding of the nature of the world, and, consequently, he can only see her in terms of the shape of his theory (rather than as she might actually be).

Finally, our last consideration here will be to turn the focus to the other side of things. What kind of blameworthiness has Raskolnikov incurred? It seems clear that most, if not all, of us would consider Raskolnikov's actions to be wrong (at least on reflection). Regardless of his motives, the calculated murder of Alyona and her sister<sup>92</sup> is immoral and Raskolnikov is guilty. He deserves some sort of punishment; he deserves to be blamed for what he has done. Indeed, this is built into the name of the novel: *Crime and Punishment*. What will occupy us in the postlude, then, will be to examine what this looks like between Raskolnikov and Sonya, as well as to examine a situation between Rorschach and Nite Owl. These two personal interactions will give us an opportunity to consider what blame which is *not* theorized might look like.

Before that, however, we will turn to further considerations regarding pathologies of blame and ways in which these pathologies might manifest in the world.

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<sup>92</sup> Though I didn't address it above, it is worth noting that Raskolnikov also ended up killing Alyona's sister Lizaveta; he had not originally intended to do so and she was supposed to be out of the house, but she arrived during the deed and in order to cover up his deed Raskolnikov killed her as well.

## Chapter 4

### Pathologies: The Significance of Theories and Theorized Blame

*“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” – Matthew 7:1-5 (NIV)*

#### 4.1 Pathologies of Blame

So, it may be useful at this point to take a brief step back and remind ourselves of why we are pursuing this line of thought in the first place. I have been preoccupied at some length with trying to demonstrate places at which problems might arise with blame and especially our accounts and theories of blame. This, of course, presupposes that there *are* problems with blame, which most would likely agree about. It will be useful to be clearer now about what sorts of problems there are with blame. I do not think it is necessary or, perhaps, even possible to provide an exhaustive account of the problems of blame and

certainly not of the potential manifestations of problematic blame. Nonetheless, there are at least some recognizable ways in which blame seems to reliably be problematic.

That blame goes awry seems indisputable both in our normal experiences of the world, as well as in the literature on blame. Neal Tognazzini and D. Justin Coates have been instrumental in providing a broad and foundational treatment of blame as a starting point for further development through their work *Blame: Its Nature and Norms* as well as their article in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* titled “Blame.”<sup>93</sup> In the first chapter of *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, the authors addressed the issue of problematic or bad blame under the heading “The Ethics of Blame,” and listed a minimum of three “interdependent sets of propriety conditions governing blame,” which are conditions relating to the transgressor, the would-be blamer, and the blaming interaction itself. Violations of these conditions would render blame faulty or problematic.<sup>94</sup> They further noted these conditions as being conditions of blameworthiness, jurisdiction, and procedure, respectively.

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<sup>93</sup> D. Justin Coates and Neal Tognazzini, “The Contours of Blame,” in Coates and Tognazzini, eds., *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, pp. 3-26, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Neal Tognazzini, and D. Justin Coates, “Blame,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/blame/>>.

<sup>94</sup> Coates and Tognazzini, “The Contours of Blame,” 17-18.

In their more recent article in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* they seem to have shifted their approach slightly, at least in regard to their naming procedures. In the section “When is Blame Appropriate?” the authors distinguish three overarching concerns which still correspond with those first addressed: facts about the person being blamed, facts about the blaming interaction, and facts about the blamer.<sup>95</sup> There is a move away from the legal terminology of “jurisdiction” and “procedure,” and an addition of the term “facts” as being the relevant *thing* to be known.

On another account, with which we will spend a bit more time, Miranda Fricker provides us the term “pathologies of blame,” and once again, attempts to provide us with some normative conditions for blame which reveal these pathologies by implication.<sup>96</sup> Though we won’t look into detail at all of these, it is worth laying them out to have an idea of the kinds of considerations which are at issue. Fricker gives the following conditions:

1. The blamed person must actually be blameworthy.
2. Blame must be proportional.
3. Blame should remain within the appropriate sphere, temporally and relationally.

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<sup>95</sup> Tognazzini and Coates, “Blame.”

<sup>96</sup> Fricker, “What’s the Point of Blame?” 168-171.

4. Blame must be within the “proper ethical register,” that is, properly related to the intentionality and character of the blamed.
5. Blame must allow or appropriately regard risk-taking and moral development of people generally.
6. Blame should not be leveled in cases of moral luck or “no-fault responsibility.”<sup>97</sup>

Given these conditions, some pathological manifestations of blame may be things such as blaming non-blameworthy individuals, disproportional blame, blame that I hold onto too long or allow to affect non-relevant relationships, blame that targets lapses of character as if they were ingrained characteristics, blame which manifests from fault-finding or censorious attitudes, and blame toward victims of bad luck.

The method here is to list some kind of general rules, conditions, or norms which govern appropriate or ethical blaming so that we can recognize the pathologies as they arise. What is most important for my purposes is not that we accurately and exhaustively determine all of the possible pathologies or problems of blame, but rather that we seek to understand ways in which the pathologies arise. This becomes even more critical because of the way in which the problem of blaming norms and pathologies is often addressed. These pathologies are treated as problems of facts, and a quasi-scientific method is

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<sup>97</sup> Fricker, “What’s the Point of Blame?” 168-171.

taken. *If only I could accurately detail a theory or account of blame, then list out the normative conditions for blame, I would be able to fix our blaming encounters. Blame is just an analytical problem, but once all the details are broken down and made plain, the answers will be evident.*

And so, whether intentional or not, the style of approaching the problems of blame seems to manifest as a theory-making endeavor, in which one tries to provide a more and more robust account of the nature and norms of blame so that our blaming practices might accordingly improve. In Encounters, I've tried to begin showing some limitations to these sorts of theories and also to introduce a new problem in theorized blame. Now, I will seek to show how these problems track onto the pathologies. The implication is that our formal theories are not a sufficient way of addressing the problem of pathologies of blame. The intention is not to repudiate the work philosophy has done in theory-making; the process of providing formal theories is a valuable and insightful one. My intention is only to give attention toward problems of blame that do not appear resolvable through theory-making and to attempt to illuminate why this might be. The theories remain useful, just not conclusive (or unable to address other pathological manifestations of blame).

Finally, a note in regard to Fricker's method of addressing blame. Her goal seems primarily oriented toward trying to establish the purpose of blame, and from this starting point she finds that a paradigm is more useful than a typical theory or analysis of blame. The reason she sees the paradigm account of blame

as necessary is an additional critique in relation to treatments of blame – one which I have not provided so far. On Fricker’s account, blame as a phenomenon in the world, is significantly disunified. By this, she means that there are so many different forms and manifestations of appropriate blame that seeking necessary and sufficient conditions in the manner of theoretical analysis would result in too narrow of a concept of blame. There are, she thinks, aspects that might still be fundamental or critical to a notion of blame which we must discard from the theory because they are not *necessary* features which are always present (for example, emotion).

It seems to me that this is a useful way of addressing this problem; however, it is not the same problem with which I am concerned. Additionally, Fricker’s account does not avoid the *problem of theory* as I have expressed it. In Encounters, I noted three problems in relation to theory: the *problem of shifting viewpoints*, the *problem of knowledge*, and the *problem of complexity*. All of these apply to the paradigm account just as they would the theory because the paradigm must still be *constructed* in the same way as a theory (and, recall that on my view of theory here the central features of “theory” are reflection and theoretical or rational development). While Fricker’s paradigm might fix a problem of necessary and sufficient conditions internal to the usefulness of theories, it does not avoid the developmental problems I’ve illustrated. And, of course, the paradigm and Fricker’s considerations do not address the *problem of theorized blame* since this is not fundamentally a problem with the theory or



paradigm but with how I encounter the other in the blaming encounter. Any problems relating to theorized blame can arise regardless of whether there is an account, theory, or paradigm in use.

## 4.2 Theories and Pathologies

Let us begin with Fricker's first normative condition and its potential pathologies. Fricker's exact formulation is as follows: "First, the blamed party must be *blameworthy*, where this crucially involves the requirement that the moral expectations on her not be unreasonably demanding."<sup>98</sup> What might this entail? Again, Fricker usefully provides more clarification: the moral expectations on the blameworthy person must be reasonable practically, epistemically, and moral-epistemically. All good so far, then.

The next consideration would be regarding how we would ascertain such details. How do I confirm that someone is actually blameworthy and that the moral expectations are not "unreasonably demanding"? Seemingly, I would need to gain some information or already possess some information about myself and the other. I need to know some things about this person and what they did, about myself and how I was wronged in the encounter, perhaps about the situation (for instance, were there outside pressures on either of us?), and so on. We have addressed this already in the form of problems laid out in

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<sup>98</sup> Fricker, "What's the Point of Blame?" p. 168.

Encounters: the *problem of knowledge* and the *problem of complexity*. However, the first of these we took in its relation to the formation of the theory. Right now, we are considering the application. What the problem of knowledge entails is that my theory itself does not already contain the needed knowledge of myself or others to enable me to blame accurately. In this moment, then, I need to be open to the proper knowledge of myself and the other and ready to use it appropriately. To the extent that all relevant details about who I am and who you are do not already exist within the theory, I must go beyond my theory in the blame encounter. This remains true in regard to the *problem of complexity* in that the assertion is that existence and being-in-the-world are sufficiently complex that I cannot account for the details in the theory (and, indeed, it seems part of the point of the theory is to *reduce* details).

The *problem of shifting viewpoints* is also relevant here. How did I construct this condition regarding blameworthiness in the first place? I took some concrete experiences in the world, compared them, pulled out the general principle or condition about “reasonable moral expectations” for others, and then it became a part of my theory. At this point, the condition is an abstract thing. The condition of “reasonably demanding moral expectations” has no one instance that fulfills it, no particular and exact manifestation in the world. And so again, in the moment of the encounter, I need to go beyond the theory itself.

Fricker continues, “Second, blame must of course be proportionate to the wrongdoing, for it is the degree of wrongdoing that justifies the degree of

blame.”<sup>99</sup> Here again, many of the same problems arise. What is the measure of proportionality? There cannot be any precise formulation that corresponds to every given instance in the world, so the *problem of shifting viewpoints* still forces us to acknowledge the gap in the theory. Disproportionate blame will continue to manifest because *all blame must be disproportionate*. How could it be otherwise? Even if I do exactly to you what you have done to me, the situation is changed; I am not you and you are not me. Is it the same thing to punch you for punching me? Not obviously. There are innumerable things that could affect this: maybe I have a history of abuse and this triggers further psychological pain, or I have a rare condition where I don’t feel pain at all, or you are embarrassed in a way that I am not, or we hit with different force, and so on.

To the extent that we contrive or reason to find proportionate blaming responses, we are still of necessity making a judgment that goes beyond the theory *or* we must employ theorized blame and shape the person in such a way that the abstraction from the theory can now apply (more on this below). If disproportionate blaming is pathological, it seems I might be committing the pathology of disproportionate blame just in blaming generally; determining when it becomes a “pathology” is unclear (at least in relation to the theory itself). What is relevant here is not whether or not we can ever determine when something is problematically disproportionate, but only that the theory cannot

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<sup>99</sup> Fricker, “What’s the Point of Blame?” p. 168.

provide that to us. It is exactly this sort of uncertainty and blurriness along the borders that often allows so many pathological elements to slide into blame and to persist for so long. The theory, then, cannot protect us from this pathology – only guide us. But it only guides us if we treat the theory *as a guide* rather than as a solution key.

This brings me to another concern and a way of addressing two additional theory-related issues. One we might call *perfect theory* and the other *right theory*. We will address *perfect theory* first. The above considerations (in addition to Encounters) have been primarily aimed toward arguing against perfect theories – that is, the idea that a theory might enable us to blame rightly in the world. One response might be that no one really means “perfect” in this strict of a sense, and that theories still help us in *most* cases which is better than nothing. Perhaps this is the case, but it masks some things. First, even if, on reflection, we might suggest that we don’t *really* think of theories of blame as a pursuit of perfect theories, it currently seems like the dominant trend within the literature is in this direction. Along with the development of theories is a lack of any obvious concern for the possible excesses of a theoretical approach. Second, and building off this previous issue, there is an additional problem of theorized blame, and it is a problem which is connected to theories of blame though independent. Part of the claims I am making is that theories of blame when taken to excess facilitate instances of theorized blame (though theory-making is certainly not the only source of instances of theorized blame).

Narrowing back in on our blaming concerns and theories, the theory cannot be perfect because it is not real. No matter how complex the theory is, it cannot account for everything. The world and persons and blaming encounters are all sufficiently complicated that I will often find myself without a clear path to appropriate behavior. Of course, real life is also incredibly messy and all sorts of things throw us off. The first conclusion, then, is that no theory can preclude pathological blame, and this means that our approach to the problems of blame in philosophy should not be simply to make better theories. Now, this claim is easily misunderstood. It may first appear to be something like the observation that we will never be rid of pathological blame regardless of the quality of the theory because people are flawed and messed up. The observation then is one regarding the insufficient rationality of people or something of this sort. This is not what I am saying. Rather, no theory can preclude pathological blame because the theory cannot *in principle* sufficiently address the concerns of reality and existence. I will always have to have something abstract and fabricated in hand as a theory before the moment of encounter and I will always have to go beyond it in some way to make my judgments and blame.

Now, to the second theory-related issue, that of *right theory*—here we have another problem in relation to theory-in-the-world. How do I know when I have the right theory? Indeed, there are differing views and each will have different deliverances in practice. There are worldviews that provide formalized theories with deliverances many find problematic. The fact that we have contentious

moral problems that divide people reveals this dramatically. If I blame you for being pro-choice and you blame me for being pro-life, how will we settle the dispute? Even within philosophy, there are multiple perspectives on ethical theory which provide the context for appropriate blaming. Do certain blaming instances end up being pathological only from a certain perspective? Most of us have theories or accounts that differ in at least one way, and often in many ways. It is worth acknowledging and reckoning with this reality: there are competing theories for what should form our background ethical considerations of theory, and even if we narrowed it down to one, it still wouldn't be able to guarantee freedom from pathological blame. As it is, though, the fact that we aren't currently able to narrow it down to any one right theory means pathologies of blame have more freedom in precisely this ambiguity and uncertainty among the rightness of different moral actions, as well as the ambiguity among appropriate responses.

In relation to this consideration, part of what the philosophical tactic has been is to engage in a process of formulating theories which we then critique and debate each other on. We struggle over which theory is the *right* theory as if the answer to this will then solve the problem. I would argue, however, that this is again to misunderstand the nature of the problem – at least insofar as the problem is pathological manifestations of blame and our desire is to continually improve our understanding of them and how to live and exist rightly in the world. Solving the problem of theory by *proving* the one right theory and

rigorously detailing it – even if it were possible – still wouldn't solve our problems with pathology. Even worse, this emphasis on theory misses the sorts of pathologies that arise from theorized blame which we will address shortly.

Further, even if we all hold the same ethical theory, I can execute the blaming encounter in a theorized way. The scenario of the moral philosopher in “Encounters” who explodes at a grocery store worker is an example of this; the ethical framework is completely irrelevant in this case. What happens is that I am not seeing this other person as a person at all; I (the moral philosopher) am overwhelmed with my own concerns and problems and when the blameworthy moment arises, the Other never really even comes before my gaze. I never *see* him at all.

To be a bit clearer and attempt to ensure that this isn't taken too far I would like to assert again that this is not to suggest that theories of blame are bad, not useful, or problematic in themselves. Indeed, it is natural to have accounts or to formulate theories, and there are a wide number of important and necessary uses for these things. And, it must be noted, it does appear to be the case that having a good theory *can* aid us in avoiding instances of pathological blame. None of these are the things being contested. Rather, I am suggesting first that theories of blame are not sufficient and that it is worth being clear on how and in what ways this is the case, and second that theorized blame is an additional problem in relation to theories of blame and one which might be exacerbated by excesses of theories of blame.

### 4.3 Theories, Accounts, and Theorized Blame

If we return to the concerns of “Encounters,” we can consider first what instances of pathological blame (that is, the violation of the blame-conditions) might look like for the informal accounts of blame. It might be tempting to think that the individual with an informal account of blame (which is likely the vast majority of people) has few or even no conditions with which to operate in the world. This is a mistake, however; it is not that the person with an informal account of blame has no conditions, but only that he has either not reflected on the conditions, has not rationally developed them, or both. But of course, they are there. This was why I spent time pointing to ways in which one might acquire them through childhood or the influence of pastors, teachers, and parents with the content of the account not being reflected or theoretically developed.

In this case, then, perhaps the pathologies often arise from having an insufficiently developed framework (at least pathologies in relation to the theory as we’ve been dealing with them from Fricker, Tognazzini, and Coates). I blame disproportionately because I haven’t realized that there is a condition regarding proportionality that I ought to be taking into consideration. In this and many other situations, I seem to not have fully realized what kind of constraints there should be about my behavior to others (or I don’t care about the constraints and



so I do not see them as being true). So I can act pathologically in blame from not having “enough of” a theory about blame.

Having an informal account does not mean I will necessarily blame in pathological ways – it means rather that I am open in a particular way to pathological excesses. Without reflected conditions about how to blame appropriately, I can blame all sorts of ways without cognitive dissonance.

As the account becomes formalized and more like a theory, though, I begin to limit the ways in which I can blame because I have set boundaries or conditions around my practice of blaming. I have determined that there are certain ways of blaming that are problematic, that I should avoid being hypocritical, being hasty in blaming without all the information, or being disproportional in blaming. Now, where do the pathologies arise? For this, it is useful to consider the relation between theory and theorized blame.

Theory and theorized blame can stand independently. I can develop a theory without having to encounter someone through a theorized approach; maybe I have a fully articulated understanding of blame but am still able to set that aside enough (or in the right amount, whatever this might mean) in the moment of blame to try to see this person for who they are, where they’re coming from, to be in this moment with them. Also, I can pull someone apart into pieces – abstract them as parts – without having a developed theory in hand; this happens all the time in instances of racism in which I view someone based

on some abstracted quality of them, and then blame them for something without having reflected on any conditions of blame.

While the concepts of blame-theories and theorized blame can stand apart, it is noteworthy how they can interact – especially as a significant part of the concerns in this work are related to how we might go about addressing pathologies of blame. To begin constructing a theory, to reflect and rationally develop something, is difficult and rewarding work. It allows a systematicity and level of understanding that is not obviously available otherwise. A very significant temptation is to develop an ever more sophisticated and complex theory – after all, since there will always be a gap between the theory and application there will always be new instances that force me to adjust the theory. A danger can arise here: if I am constantly thinking in this way, it is a very short step to viewing my blaming encounters similarly.

The encounter then becomes an analytical process. I view the entire instance and especially the other person in relation to the theory (and to theory-updating). When I'm blaming someone, I'm careful to point out all of the ways in which they're blameworthy, becoming exacting in my procedure of determining guilt. I've searched myself and I'm not being hypocritical or spiteful – my only concern is justice and ethical fidelity! – and I've determined exactly how the other is guilty. I know the facts of the situation – you knew what you were doing when you crossed this line. I am careful to weigh the offense and determine an appropriate blaming consequence, which I exact with precision and without

resentment or joy (except joy in justice itself, of course). Not only these things, though, but throughout the experience itself the way I am *seeing* is in terms of trying to take in these details. I'm interrogating you about your motivations, questioning the circumstances that we're in, looking for evidence of malicious intent, and so on. I'm seeking the relevant data points to put into my theory, or even for ways to update the theory itself.

But what do I sacrifice in this? What do I lose in this interaction? It is hard to be precise about this because it is not the sort of thing which can be conveyed precisely. But there is something missing here, something in the way I encounter you. There's some eerie lack of concern for who you are. Indeed, this methodical way of practicing blame has no concern at all for differentiation between persons. All types of relations would fall under the same kind of criteria, even if I specify how my normative conditions shift in relation to relatives or co-workers or animals.

It would seem that I am seeing the Other theoretically, as pieces and abstracted components; if I do this, then it might be possible to re-shape the Other into some form in which the condition would then apply. Especially if I allow the condition to generate the possibilities. If my theory is rigorous enough, perhaps I have accurately determined what all of the possible reasonable demands are in regards to someone actually being blameworthy. Maybe I set up a rubric, and I make a list, however long, of all the possible reasonable moral expectations of others. Then, when I encounter someone in the blaming situation,

to determine her blameworthiness, I only have to pull her apart, grab the relevant “facts,” fit these facts into the rubric, and then the conclusion presents itself to me.

What this means, though, is that I need to utilize theorized blame; I have to see this Other piecemeal, as disconnected aspects of a self. To apply the condition, especially if I take it in this very detailed way, seems to force me into seeing the Other in this theorized form. Well, what is the problem with this? The problem is that it ignores the concrete-ness of the situation, the ineliminable complexities of persons and experience and reality, the acknowledgement that the thing one is encountering is a person. To take a condition like this and try to apply it to the concrete encounter forces you at some point to divorce reality. At some point, I have to say that this thing in the encounter lines up with the condition. If part of the reasonable moral expectation is that I must ensure “the agent could reasonably be expected to have acted in the required way,” (this is part of Fricker’s first condition) then at some point I have to refer to some thing—some act or phrase or conglomeration of facts—as evidence that this is or is not the case in this real blaming encounter. And this is true even if I have not taken the “excessively theoretical” route of specifying some rubric.

Why does this matter? Because it is this space, the space between the theory and the application in which the pathologies manifest. The situation is not just that the pathology occurs because one is not accurately regarding a condition; the problem is that the condition can never be precisely fulfilled. The

condition is not real; it is a framework, ideally a useful one – but it does not actually exist. And so every possible real encounter in the world must differ from it in at least some small way. Most of the time, this is probably not significant. There are assuredly many situations which are so clear that the “pathology” is recognizable and acknowledged broadly. If it were this easy, though, pathological blame might not be a problem. The trouble is that many situations are significantly more complicated than this. In some cases, the reasonable expectations are unspecified or unspecifiable, or it’s not clear whether and to what extent someone “understood the moral significance” of his behavior, and so on.

What should be made clear here is that I’m not saying theory itself always *causes* problems, but that it does not adequately address them all. However, there is more to be said here, and two important things to emphasize. It seems to be the case that there are directions and forms *theory itself* can take which contribute to pathologies of blame, but this importantly manifests in relation to theorized blame. Theory in connection with theorized blame is not just problematic in terms of still not accounting for the pathologies, but actually serves to intensify the pathological manifestations.

That this phenomenon is the case has already been briefly hinted at above. Theory can be fleshed out in varying intensities. I might just have some intuitions about the norms of blame, or the concept that there *are* norms of blame. Or, I may specify some broad categories of normative concerns (in relation to the blamed,

blamer, and blaming encounter, perhaps). Additionally, I could further specify conditions regarding each of these (perhaps that to be blameworthy includes reasonable expectations practically, epistemically, and moral-epistemically, etc.). Even further, I could start enumerating precise ways in which this condition could be held – perhaps a list of situations in which the practical aspect of reasonable moral expectations might be met.

It is not unreasonable at this point, then, to expect that what could easily occur in the blaming situation is that I begin to see you in abstracted form very quickly. After all, I have to get to the *facts*, which can be divorced from you as a person. So I go down the list (the list might possibly be memorized through experience or rigorous study), and I measure whether or not you meet the criteria. Now, further depending on how I view the theory, this may be more or less a *necessary* process. If the theory is intended to be conclusive, something *scientific, factual, and analytical*, then I would *necessarily* view you in a theorized way. Because there is no other way to determine your blameworthiness.

But how easily now do the pathologies arise! I mean, you're not even human anymore – you're no longer a person. You're a list of qualities and I'm prepared to treat you as just that abstract list of qualities – in view of how you fit into my list of criteria for blameworthiness. Indeed, in so many cases, *justice* or *fairness*, is construed as just this kind of "objective," "neutral," "unbiased" way of seeing others. I am instructed to focus on the criteria and not to be distracted by irrelevancies. But in this mode of seeing I become myopic if not blind.

The intensification of theory and its interrelatedness to theorized blame *position us* for pathologies of blame to occur. This becomes even more relevant once we realize that our discussion of conditions and pathologies obscures something: it is not just the pathology addressed by a particular normative constraint that is significant. A rigorous attention to “pathologies of blame” which occur from particular conditions, even if we give rigorous attention to all the conditions that we know of (conditions regarding the blamed, blamer, and blaming encounter), may still leave us open to some other pathology. I can check all the boxes regarding normative conditions (is she blameworthy, am I avoiding hypocrisy, is my blame fair and even-handed in response to the offense), and still miss something morally significant – *if* I am seeing in the theorized way. Because in the theorized mode I am not properly open to this knowledge in the right way; the complexities of the encounter and who we are in the encounter are not evident. This becomes evident when we think of the “cold” and “calculating” persons who seem to be rigorous rule-followers with no concern for “outside” concerns like who the person is.

After all, what does it mean to determine that you’re blameworthy? Where is my line drawn? Obviously, there are endless debates to be had about this, but that only reinforces my point. What I am suggesting is that the theorized viewpoint, in the moment of encounter, must be limited by the contents already within the theory. The theorized blamer knows the criteria for blameworthiness and so he simply goes through and judges whether or not the criteria have been

met. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. Perfectly balanced and fair. Like Rorschach.

Of course, even many of these thoughts assume that “checking the boxes of normative conditions,” is a possible thing, which it’s not clear is the case. These thoughts provide another layer. One of the pathological manifestations of blame is just this sort of theoretical and theorized blame combination in which the one blaming believes himself to be perfectly just and righteous *just because of how perfectly theoretical in his outlook and application he is*. This is the character type of Javert from *Les Misérables*, who believes that he has been exacting and perfect in this way (the application of the law) until the *person* of Valjean – who he is and how he expresses himself to Javert over time – challenges these notions to the point that Javert’s entire outlook crumbles and he is unable to live with himself. Javert’s fault manifests in that he is unable to see past his theory (in this case, the law) and how it maps onto others. He views others in connection to how they relate to the law and nothing else until Valjean. For the first time, Javert appears to see someone in a *real* way, in what I have called an *attended* viewpoint – we can call this *attended apprehension* (which essentially tracks to Newman’s *real apprehension*).

The point of all of this, then, is to demonstrate the gap between the theory and application, and the interaction of theory and theorized blame to show that providing a normative condition as part of a formal theory does not necessarily prevent pathologies of blame – indeed, certain interactions of theory and



theorized blame may enhance pathologies of blame. In other words, theories do not secure a defense against pathologies of blame, and, in connection with theorized blame, might even intensify pathologies of blame.

The concerns of pathology in relation to theorized blame, then, are less focused on the norms being trampled and more concerned with my ability to apprehend the other. Obviously, if norms are not broken, theorized blame does not usually reveal itself as a problem (though we might still find someone uncomfortable in the way they seem to see us even if they have not done anything problematic). It is also worth noting that there are all sorts of reasons why I might need to view someone in a more abstract, theoretical way; perhaps I am trying to perform a complicated surgery; locate a serial killer; or simply without the time, energy, and empathy to invest in every individual person the resources for apprehending in a different way. However, part of the point regarding blame is that this theorized way of seeing opens us up to significant problems because it obscures our view of the Other as a person and prevents us from being open to the uniqueness of that moment in significant ways – we are inclined toward shaping others into who we think they are. It allows certain ways of treating and relating to others that might not be viable in a different context. This is especially the case in difficult ethical issues and in relation to blame.

If I see you as having trampled some important moral concern and I find myself unable to see you personally for whatever reason, the conditions of my

behavior toward you become more open. Now, I'm not arguing that this is a conscious thing. It's not obvious at all that this is done intentionally. We're not usually thinking "How can I de-personalize this person in order to justify my following actions to them?" But isn't this just how so many blaming situations go wrong? Social media presents this obviously because the de-personalization is built into its functionality; we're immediately distanced from the Other, from a serious second-personal interaction. Obviously, this distance doesn't force pathology, but it allows and likely fosters it. But even in the presence of others, there are numerous reasons why we might not really see them. And then, caught up in whatever is going on in our lives, whatever framework – reflected and rational or not – that we hold, and the heat of the moment, we do things that are problematic (from our future perspective or the perspective of others).

Encounters, then, was an attempt to lay out the framework for these issues, while this chapter has sought to bring the framework into connection with the notion of pathological blame. In the next chapter, Manifestations, I hope to shed more light on what this actually looks like through different examples. Part of the difficulty involved in these issues is that I can only gesture toward what's missing because the sorts of things that are missing are things that we must *see in the encounter* and they are often things of the form of personal knowledge which are not reducible to propositional explication.

## Chapter 5

### Manifestations: The Embodiment of Theories and Theorized Blame

*“What philosophers say about actuality [Verkelighed] is often just as disappointing as it is when one reads on a sign in a secondhand shop: Pressing Done Here. If a person were to bring his clothes to be pressed, he would be duped, for the sign is merely for sale.”<sup>100</sup>*

#### 5.1 Like a Memorandum

Theorized blame can manifest for a variety of reasons and is intricately tied to other aspects of a person’s life. Who I am (in all the ambiguity that implies) and who you are (also in all the ambiguity *that* implies) shape how we will meet each other in this blaming encounter. This is not a world of “pure” facts in which I can somehow disinterestedly express impartial judgments about line-crossing scenarios. First, then, we will look at some potential elements in

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<sup>100</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, I*, edited and translated by Howard V. Kong and Edna H. Hong, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 32.

relation to the blamer and the blamed, some ways that theory can be disrupted by who we are. In pursuit of this, I will sketch out some scenarios to illustrate further what theorized blame looks like. Second, I will attempt to connect all of the pieces together to conclude the main threads of this work. The point we are striving toward is to have clearly before us (or as clearly as possible) the way in which theorized blame manifests pathologically in the world. Perhaps the point ends up belabored, but given the resistance of some of these concepts to theoretical formulation I have sought to be lavish in the attempt of illustrating the points in the hope that an image might emerge worth more than the sum of the words. As one might imagine, should the image come together early, what follows may read as excess.

What then, are some ways in which pathological blame this might manifest? What kind of factors become relevant? First, a clarification: I am not trying to exhaustively detail the kinds of things which impact the way we see others; that would likely be a Sisyphean task. The point is to illustrate some ways in which aspects of who we or others are shape how we see the world and others, and in what ways this impacts blame.

In this regard, we might start anywhere and the chosen starting point is somewhat arbitrary. Let us think about the role of forgiveness and time as it relates to blame. In many cases, our instruction on something like forgiveness does not come in neat, philosophical packaging. It may be the experiences we have of forgiving or being forgiven, religious instruction, the example of parents

and teachers, and so forth. All of these different inputs will shape our perception of the nature of something like “forgiveness.” If I grow up in a family where no one ever apologizes, I may struggle to understand the value of forgiveness. Even if I later ascribe to some worldview which incorporates forgiveness, I may struggle to practice forgiveness in that way or I may not even utilize that part of the framework at all. In many cases unless some challenge reveals itself, I can hold onto an ingrained perception of forgiveness as weakness and also have taken upon myself some religious perspective that values forgiveness. The two just haven’t come into conflict yet, or at least not in a way that I can see.

If, for whatever reason, I spend years or decades of my life in some context where there is little to no forgiveness ever offered, I may lose out completely on an understanding of forgiveness. This withholding of forgiveness may be the way I operate in relation to others I encounter.<sup>101</sup> When someone has crossed a line, it may be that these reinforced ideas about forgiveness-as-weakness dominate. Then, in being a part of the blaming encounter, this aspect of my account or theory – even if it is in conflict with other things in my account or theory – may guide my perception of the Other.

Even further, it is also possible that I could come to have believed something like the statement, “Forgiveness is a good thing, something I’d like to

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<sup>101</sup> This is just one possible result; obviously, the lack of forgiveness could also create in me an acute awareness of the value of forgiveness – seeing it as something I would have like to receive but haven’t – which then manifests as a quickness to forgive others. And this, also, would have potential pathological manifestations.

receive, and something I should give to others,” and, at the same time, my experiences of being unforgiven or of having forgiveness-as-weakness ingrained throughout my life before this still come to dominate. And then, in the blaming encounter, what manifests is still my “old beliefs.” Again, this is because it is not simply fixing a theory or determining the right theory that is at play. People are much more complex than this.

To put things another way, even if I have an “appropriate” view of forgiveness – whatever we want to say the right account of forgiveness is – it still may be the case that I apply this account of forgiveness to the other impersonally; as a consequence of duty. Indeed, this is just what Kant and many Kantians would tell us *should* be the case.<sup>102</sup> But this seems to get something wrong; forgiveness and blame are *personal* matters. They are things that occur between me and you, and my reasons for treating you in one way or another should have something to do with *you*.

Theorized blame, then, relates to this: it is just this sort of seeing you from the theory rather than as *you*. The pathological consequences manifest most prominently when the view in consideration is already problematic: that is, when we have a “wrong” view of forgiveness, the pathological treatment of the other is

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<sup>102</sup> Most notably, Kant develops this in the *Groundwork*: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated and edited by Mary Gregor with an introduction by Christine M. Korsgaard, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

most obvious.<sup>103</sup> But on this view, it is also possible that you might treat the other in the right way for the wrong reasons. This, of course, assumes that the *reasons* for doing something matter for its rightness or wrongness, which you may or may not agree with.

What is central is this: the case of forgiveness and its relation to me over time is one thing which will impact how I see the other in the blaming encounter. So what does it look like to see someone in a theorized way rather than in some other way? Just what is it that is so different?

The novel *Anna Karenina* deals, at least partly, with the adulterous relationship of Anna Karenina with Count Alexey Vronsky.<sup>104</sup> Anna's husband, Alexey Alexandrovich Karenin (yes, he has the same first name as Anna's new lover), first discovers the possibility that Anna has fallen in love with someone else through the reaction of others at a social gathering. To him, there had been nothing strange about Anna and Vronsky's relations, but he was certain that others had seen something problematic in it. This leads him into reflection about how he should respond.

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<sup>103</sup> Pathological blame can also take many forms. While it might be physical violence that seems most obvious, there other ways of blaming that might be inappropriate, some which are inappropriate in particular contexts though not always. And so these pathological instances of blame could appear as hurtful words, the ending of relationships, distancing ourselves, withholding goodwill, and so forth. Many of these other instances are much more difficult to identify but seem just as relevantly problematic in relation to blame and pathology.

<sup>104</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, translated with an introduction and notes by Rosamund Bartlett, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

His initial response is incredulity; he is not used to questioning the trust he has in someone and the possibility of Anna loving another presents questions that are new for Alexey. Tolstoy writes:

Alexey Alexandrovich was standing face to face with life, with the possibility of his wife loving someone other than himself, and this seemed to him very nonsensical and incomprehensible because it was life itself. Alexey Alexandrovich had spent his entire life living and working in official spheres which had to do with the reflections of life. And every time he had bumped into life itself he had shied away from it. He was now experiencing a feeling similar to that which would be felt by someone who, calmly crossing a bridge over a precipice, suddenly discovers that this bridge has been taken down, revealing an abyss. This abyss was life itself, while the bridge was the artificial life Alexey Alexandrovich had been leading. For the first time conjectures occurred to him about the possibility of his wife falling in love with somebody, and he was horrified by the idea.<sup>105</sup>

Following this, Alexey's thoughts circle for a while before he can move forward. He has glimpsed the possibility of the abyss, but is shying away from it still. Part of what is going on here is that Alexey has been studiously avoiding a certain way of interacting with other persons:

For the first time he conjured up a vivid picture of her personal life, her thoughts and her desires, but the idea that she could and should have her own private life was so alarming to him that he hastened to drive it away. This was the abyss he was afraid of peering into. Putting himself into the thoughts and feelings of another person was a mental activity alien to Alexey Alexandrovich.<sup>106</sup>

Alexey is coming before a choice. This moment, this possibility regarding Anna is bringing before him an opportunity. It is shaking the way he has been

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<sup>105</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 145.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.



approaching the world and others up until this time. He has tried to avoid “putting himself into the thoughts and feelings of another person,” but Anna’s relation to him (and, surely, the consequences such an affair would have on him) are forcing him to realize the bridge he was walking on is gone. Except that he doesn’t want to do this. He reminds himself that questions about her feelings and conscience and soul are not his concern: those are things for her to deal with and connected to religion. His duty, as her husband, is to caution her, to bring before her the facts of the situation. Tolstoy continues:

And everything Alexey Alexandrovich planned to say to his wife now took clear shape in his head. As he thought over what he would say, he regretted that he would have to use his time and mental energy for domestic purposes, with so little to show for it; nevertheless, the form and sequence of the things he was going to say clearly and distinctly assembled themselves in his head, like a memorandum. ‘I must say and clearly articulate the following: firstly, explain the significance of public opinion and decorum; secondly, explain the religious significance of marriage; thirdly, if necessary, indicate the possible unhappiness for our son; fourthly, indicate her own unhappiness.’<sup>107</sup>

In many ways, it might seem as though Alexey is doing a lot of things right. He’s pointing to the issues related to her blameworthiness, addressing the facts of the matter, being careful not to overstep and blame disproportionately, and so forth. He is careful, thoughtful, and rational. As you might guess, the actual encounter itself goes horribly and without any resolution of the issue since what Alexey is not doing is understanding Anna. He has an opportunity to try to

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<sup>107</sup> Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 147.

approach her as a person, but the glimpse into the abyss seems to push him back and he resorts to treating her in relation to the public's opinion of them, the sanctity of their marriage, the unhappiness of their son, and her own unhappiness. He turns his focus to abstracted concepts of her, and he shies away from approaching her as she is. The result is that she dismisses everything he says and they make no progress, except that they are not the same in relation to each other after this.

So this is our literary manifestation; let's look at a few more manifestations of pathological blame and see how theorized blame manifests further.

## **5.2 The Unforgiven, the Resentful, and the Scapegoater**

Let us sketch out a figure I will call the Unforgiven One. He is born into a strict home. Expectations on him are high and he feels a need to perform perfectly. Fortunately, he is competent and naturally gifted, and so he is able to cope to some extent under this pressure. He develops and becomes successful and capable. In particular, it is his father that has been a source of sharp condemnation and high expectations. The Unforgiven One, as a part of his upbringing and development, has learned to act and behave in particular ways—especially as these are modeled by his father. Unforgiven's father showed very little emotion and never apologized. The father continually pushes Unforgiven,

expects the best out of him and punishes him for failing to meet up to expectations. If Unforgiven ever protested, ever cried out for forgiveness, it was quickly squashed by the father's words: "Forgiveness is weakness. The world will give you nothing and take everything. Those you encounter in the world, the world itself, will give you no mercy or forgiveness. If you want to survive, if you want to succeed, you cannot give or expect forgiveness. There are others who are out there just waiting for you to show this kind of weakness and then take advantage of you. You must be stronger than this."

And so, Unforgiven learned not to give or expect forgiveness, for the world would not respond in kind. Unforgiven continues to develop and persevere, exhibiting an almost ruthless manner in his climb for more and more. He gives no quarter and expects no quarter from others. When he encounters others, he sees them in the light of these sorts of things. And more than just in terms of forgiveness or not, because a man is more than one aspect of his upbringing or personality. Unforgiven sees others in relation to his whole worldview, and this aspect of forgiveness is a part of that. When he encounters others who have made mistakes, he cannot have pity or mercy on them. Not just because he doesn't want to – that's not even a consideration. He also firmly believes that it's not good for them, not useful for them to become what they're capable of being.

When he enters blaming encounters, then, his process is straight-forward. If someone crosses some line before him, does something wrong to him, he gives

no compassion or forgiveness of any sort. They don't deserve it. At one point, a colleague – someone he had been on good terms with previously – lies and throws him under the bus so that the colleague can get a promotion they had both been competing for. Unforgiven says nothing, but he begins plotting. Through his competence and skill, he outmaneuvers the colleague and reveals the lies, then gets the colleague fired and never speaks to the colleague again. At no point does he even attempt to understand the colleague, to wonder about the colleague's background or nature or emotional state or anything else. He doesn't seek to listen or understand. He doesn't really even *see* the colleague. The colleague could be any other colleague and nothing would change in the response. There's nothing special about *this colleague* except that this colleague was the one that betrayed him.

What does it mean that Unforgiven sees the colleague in a theorized way? Essentially, it is to not see the colleague as a person – as a distinct person – and not to be open in some relevant sense to the experience and the person in the encounter as they occur. Unforgiven sees the colleague as just that person who crossed some line, and so he assesses the line crossing, the wrong that is done, the appropriate punishment, and then he carries it out. Unforgiven sees the colleague in a deficient way as just some entity that wronged him. The colleague, for all intents and purposes, just *is* a line-crosser.

What might forgiveness mean otherwise? Well, it might mean something about the Unforgiven and the colleague in the context of a personal relationship.

It might mean something about who they each are, what their desires are, what they mean to each other, the value of life and community, and so on. But, in a sense, we can act like none of these things are relevant to blame. The more we start to strip inter-personal elements, however, the more I reduce you to something like “the line-crosser” the further I remove myself from your person-ness. And, the further I remove myself from your person-ness, the more open my options for treatment of you become. Getting you fired is appropriate as a consequence of blame. It doesn’t matter what kind of family pressure you’re under, that your wife recently lost her job, that one of your kids is sick and the hospital bills are racking up, that you’ve foreclosed on your home, that your mother just died, that you struggle with anxiety and depression, that you made a mistake, that you’re in a crisis, and so on.

To be clear, these kinds of considerations are not necessarily so strict as it might first appear. Theorized blame is not an on/off switch where I shift away from an attended, personal viewpoint into a theorized one. The range of considerations of the other above might be partial considerations to a greater or lesser degree. Theorized blame is blame in which I am *moving away* from attended considerations. In the case of Unforgiven, his account of blame, of the nature of rightness and wrongness, shifts from being only a part of his account to

being part of the way that he looks at the other person.<sup>108</sup> Unforgiven sees the colleague and does not see a person, he sees abstract concepts and categories that he brings into connection with his account. His working views of forgiveness, justice, punishment, and so forth are placed onto the colleague, who is present just as pieces which can relate to these concepts.

Another way of thinking about this is that there is a certain “closed-off” character to Unforgiven’s perception of the colleague. Unforgiven is not open to anything new in the experience. He is interpreting the colleague through what Unforgiven already knows and abstracting the colleague to fit into those categories. This also illustrates again the play between theory and theorized blame. Unforgiven’s account (theory) does not remain static, but almost causes him to view the colleague in a theorized way, since he needs to do this in order to make the colleague fit in relation to his account.

For another example, let us consider the Resentful One. Resentful has been at the bottom for all of her life, always pushed down, always degraded, always hurt. She has a very justifiable anger, having been abused as a child and suffering in numerous ways through the oppression of those around her. One can only live in suffering for so long before the suffering becomes all she can see. Resentful learned long ago that men are bad and perverse, that those in power

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<sup>108</sup> You could also say that the content of Unforgiven’s account informs his seeing in the moment of the encounter.

only want to squash those beneath them, that those with money will do whatever they have to in order to keep it and to get more, and so on. She has, in effect, become a sort of Nietzschean manifestation of *ressentiment*.<sup>109</sup>

It seems clear that these things will affect the way she sees other in blaming encounters. Her life and history have shaped everything she sees, and understandably so. She will likely be quicker to blame those she views as manifestations of the suffering she's experienced throughout her life. The theorized blame might be even more evident here, since, in this case, she has precise views about men, the powerful, and the rich. When the blaming encounter pits her before a man, or a powerful person, or a rich person, or, heavens forbid, a powerful rich man, then it becomes increasingly difficult that anything other than the theorized viewpoint will dominate. He is just those abstract categories: male, rich, and powerful. He is not a person, no individual with dreams and goals, with his own struggles or mental health issues, with a background of pain or poverty or hurt. He is not even a person whose parents raised him in a particular way, or who, by providence or chance rose to his own position through resentment and struggle, and so forth. Resentful is unable to see him, but only to see the abstract categories of him and how they relate to her own account of blame and blameworthiness.

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<sup>109</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson and translated by Carol Diethe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Another example might be one we shall call the Scapegoater. The Scapegoater has made some bad decisions in his past. There are choices and actions that he's deeply ashamed of and carries with him everywhere he goes. Unconsciously – or at least without intention or reflection – he has found a way of dealing with his pain and shame: he externalizes it. In blaming situations, especially those in which the line-crosser has done something like the things he carries shame about in relation to himself, he is quick to externalize the judgment he feels he deserves onto this line-crosser.

Again, he does not see the line-crosser as a person. He is fixated in this case on the line-crossing event and its relation to himself. He sees the Other in relation to his own guilt and shame and pain, but this is not empathy – this is not seeing the Other as a person.<sup>110</sup> His theorized view does not bring him any closer to understanding *who* the Other is. It stops short of this. Scapegoater sees the line-crossing (and, it is worth realizing, he may not even accurately understand the line-crossing; things we experience that activate shame and guilt are such strong encounters that the true nature of what we are seeing is sometimes disguised by the pain that activates within us), and views it in relation to himself

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<sup>110</sup> While it is a bit outside the immediate scope here, it is worth noting what is meant by empathy. Following John F. Crosby, we can identify empathy as a way of understanding the subjectivity of the other through our own subjectivity (John F. Crosby, "The Empathetic Understanding of Other Persons," in *Personalist Papers*, [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004]). In the case above, it seems right to say the Scapegoater might be going through his own subjectivity and taking into consideration *something* about the other, but he is not really *understanding the other person* through his subjectivity. What the Scapegoater is doing is not bringing himself closer to understanding the other, but reinforcing his own perceptions of himself.



and his own guilt and shame. Then, from this experience within himself (and recall this is where notional apprehension occurs – within the mind), he externalizes some self-hidden (or at least partially self-hidden) judgment on the other.

What we see, again, is an inability to see the other person as a person, which is a primary indicator of theorized blame. For Scapegoater, this might be slightly different in that he might see something of a person, but it's not *that* person, it's some sort of facsimile of himself. But even then, it's not exactly that, because it's an abstracted, truncated version of himself that is identified just by the blameworthiness. And so, still, the other is transformed into some abstract entity to which the account that's working in Scapegoater can be applied.

### 5.3 Conclusions

What we have, then, are at least three examples of ways in which theorized blame may manifest (four including Alexey Karenin), but certainly these are manifold. What does this all mean? Why does any of it matter?

For some, for many, perhaps, it might not matter at all. This significance of any of this relies on a certain perception of the world. The significance relates to there being problems in the way we blame one another conjoined with a view that sees blame as somehow being essential or unavoidable to being-in-the-world. This has seemingly been the default position of most of the discussions

currently in the philosophical literature, as discussed earlier within this work. However, part of my point has been that one of the ways in which we as philosophers appear to be trying to address this problem is through the presentation and refinement of theories. If only the theory is better, or the pathologies are enumerated and addressed, or more people reflect on their actions, and so forth. And, verily, all of these things are useful.

However, it's not obvious they're sufficient. Now, one response might be, well of course not! There are no "sufficient" answers. Philosophy runs into limits here, and we simply have to do the best we can with pointing toward answers. Part of this also seems to be the case, but it's not clear that this is fully right, as I have sought to show throughout this work.

One of the primary points then has been to seek to be clear about what practically it might look like to have an informal account or formal theory of blame, that is, what kinds of things are we carrying with us into blaming encounters both generally and in philosophically rigorous situations. Once this viewpoint has been expressed, I have tried to show where it's limitations might be. So, in "Encounters," we looked at the *problem of shifting viewpoints*, the *problem of knowledge*, and the *problem of complexity*, all of which I have argued place limits on the theories. In "Pathologies" I tried to be even clearer against how these limits relate to pathological manifestations of blame.

The second primary point, then, has been in relation to this idea of theorized blame. I have tried to argue that the theorized viewpoint is one in

which there is a sort of “theorizing,” abstracting process going on. It is the perspective by which I sort you into categories rather than taking you as the “whole” you are – as a *person*, and not just as any person but as *you*.

What is important to realize about these considerations, and especially about this second point, is that I am not trying to make the claim, “See, this is how pathologies *really* happen; this is *the* problem.” Rather, I am trying to point toward a relevant consideration for pathologies of blame that is not obviously being addressed. And so I pointed to pathologies as we normally think of them, that is, in relation to violating blame norms, but I have also tried to emphasize that this consideration of theorized blame adds another layer.

Crucial for this then is to see that the manifestations of Unforgiven, Resentful, and Scapegoater are not simply bad theories. Confronting them with the insufficiency of their theories and trying to correct them is not the solution. Even abstracting from the relevant practical difficulties of convincing one of these types of individuals to adjust their theory, simply one of them “having a different theory” is not obviously sufficient. And this is because the theorized viewpoint, and, in particular theorized blame, can itself be pathological. Not in all situations, but in particular situations (like those I have tried to sketch above) theorized blame is itself part of the pathology. It’s not clear that we could say that it is itself a distinct sort of pathology; as I have suggested, there may be situations in which the theorized viewpoint is appropriate. However, what is key is that theorized blame is *part of the problem* in pathological instances of blame.

To see that this is so, consider an alternative scenario with the Unforgiven. Suppose again that the colleague betrayed him in the same way. Unforgiven says nothing, begins plotting his plan, everything starts in the same way as before. He is on his way to respond, to uncover the colleague and get him fired, when he overhears something. There is someone crying in the bathroom. Curious, he moves closer, and he hears someone on the phone. It is the colleague, on the phone with his wife, and the colleague is discussing the hospital bills for their dying child as well as his shame at the things he's having to do at work in order to make enough money to take care of her.

It is plausible that in this moment, something could soften within Unforgiven. He may not change his plan, he may not change his view of forgiveness or blameworthiness – his account might stay exactly the same. Technically, he doesn't even have a second-personal interaction, because the colleague is not aware the Unforgiven is hearing any of this. And yet, in this moment, Unforgiven might have the colleague become real to him as a person in a way that he wasn't previously. While it need not, this moment could change how other things go in the blaming scenario.

I think it is misguided and misunderstanding the phenomenon to describe this as "theory-updating." To describe Unforgiven's experience of this moment as realizing some kind of proposition like, "Sometimes there are extenuating circumstances to other's actions and I might not need to be so harsh in my blaming response," is to obfuscate things. In my view, to try to condense things

down to these sorts of statements is to obscure and mar the phenomenon, to try to dress the mystery up in clothes of logic.

The second primary point then is to indicate the significance of this notion of theorized blame as being a part of the pathological manifestations of blame in the world. Nothing I have said is intended to suggest a solving of the problems of blame or an exhaustive account of pathology. The point is that we ignore theorized blame to our own detriment if our desire is to understand pathological blame.

Finally, it is relevant at this point to consider what might be possible solutions to the problem of theorized blame. This seems to be connected to this idea of seeing someone *as a person*, but it's not obvious what this might mean. For many reasons, this is beyond the scope of what we can accomplish here. However, I would like to end our discussion in the postlude by drawing some things together with the character arcs we've been examining in the prelude and interlude. My hope is that in this final section I can at least make some gestures toward what it might look like to blame in a different mode than theorized blame (something that the alternative Unforgiven scenario hints at slightly).

## Chapter 6

### Postlude: To See a World in a Grain of Sand

*“The highest and most beautiful things in life are not to be heard about, nor read about, nor seen but, if one will, are to be lived.” – Søren Kierkegaard*

There’s a very interesting moment that happens in chapter ten of *Watchmen*. Dan (Nite Owl) and Laurie (Silk Spectre) have just broken Rorschach out of prison. Laurie has to leave and Dan and Rorschach are left together, trying to continue the investigation that was started at the beginning of the story – to find out who is killing costumed heroes. Up until this point, Dan is the only person we’ve seen who has had any kind of sympathy for Rorschach. After all, they were former partners. When Rorschach breaks in and eats raw beans out of a can, Dan just asks if he wants them heated up. He’s a bit awkward with Rorschach, and things are tense. Much of this is because of Rorschach, as we discussed previously. But still, Dan isn’t calling Rorschach names, isn’t losing his

temper, isn't obviously repulsed (or at least, not as much). Dan is the only remaining friend Rorschach might have.

As the two of them are figuring out how to proceed, Rorschach makes a comment about methods, saying, "Been lazing around a long time. Maybe you've forgotten how we do things." After this comment, Dan has finally had enough and says, "Lazing...? Listen, I've had it! Who the hell do you think you are? You live off people while insulting them, nobody complains because they think you're a... lunatic... you know how hard it is, being your friend?" Dan pauses for a moment, and then says, "I... look, Rorschach, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said all that..."

Dan turns away, getting back to work and then Rorschach finally responds: "Daniel... you are... a good friend. I know that. I am sorry... that it is sometimes difficult."<sup>111</sup> And here we have it. The only apology Rorschach makes; the only vulnerability he admits. In this moment, we see Rorschach seeing himself as being addressed as a person and responding in kind.

The first thing that I want to note is Dan's initial outburst to Rorschach. This is blame, and yet, I will suggest, it is not theorized. This distinction is difficult to make, which is part of the reason we've spent all of this time laying things out before this moment. While there are still aspects of Rorschach's character that are being referenced, Dan is confronting Rorschach as a person.

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<sup>111</sup> Moore, *Watchmen*, 324.

Crosby has discussed different ways of encountering others as persons, one of which is empathy; however, Crosby suggests there are other ways. One of these other ways is a certain way of holding another person responsible, of challenging them to see themselves in a particular way. Obviously, this relates to blame. Crosby writes, "Other persons can mediate self-knowledge to me by seeing me from their point of view. I overcome illusions about myself and gain new self-knowledge by seeing myself with the eyes of others."<sup>112</sup>

As I tried to make clear, background accounts and theories are a necessary part of our functioning, and so it is inevitable that some part of the analysis or aspects of persons will come into view. So when Dan makes references to parts of Rorschach's behavior, that is what we are seeing. However, Dan's interaction with Rorschach is not determined by this. Dan is interacting genuinely and personally with Rorschach, out of concern for their relationship and the time they have spent together. While Dan has at work aspects of who Rorschach is, he still appears to be trying to see Rorschach fully in this moment.

Crosby's point regarding this personal confrontation being a way of mediating self-knowledge, then, is further vitiated by Rorschach's response. Rorschach essentially acknowledges the truth of what Dan has said. He says, "You're right and I'm sorry." One of the ways that we have to determine how the blame interaction has gone is in the response of the blamed; Rorschach seems to

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<sup>112</sup> John Crosby, *Personalist Papers*, 41.



be acknowledging that he has been seen as a person. Finally, what is most noteworthy, is that it is only in the context of this relationship, only in the context of Dan being there in relation to Rorschach and confronting him in this personal way that Rorschach even shows any glimmer of acknowledging someone else as a person. It is only to Dan that he says, “You are... a good friend. I know that. I am sorry... that it is sometimes difficult.” Rorschach here responds personally to Dan. Instead of his earlier snide comments, his characteristically withdrawn interactions, he is facing Dan and then he shakes Dan’s hand.

What is also worth noting at this point – as far as our exploration in this work is concerned – is that the statement Dan says to Rorschach, the confrontational blame, could be the exact same words uttered by someone from the theorized perspective. This is the difficulty inherent in these kinds of issues. Theorized and attended blame will not always differ in their words, and just what the differences are is not always obvious. My intentions here have not been to explore the attended perspective or to contrast the two – that work will need to be done later – but my hope is that begins to paint a picture.

Our final character exploration concerns that of Raskolnikov and particularly here his relationship to Sonya. In the Interlude I introduced him and his crime – his blameworthy action. What is worth taking note of here, then, will be the way in which Sonya interacts with him regarding his blameworthiness. Chapter four of part five of *Crime and Punishment* contains Raskolnikov’s

confession of his crime to Sonya and is, in my view, one of the greatest chapters in literature.

As far as the structure of the novel goes, two figures represent two paths for Raskolnikov. One is Sonya, who is a Christ figure, and represents a path toward repentance and redemption. The other is Svidrigailov, a satanic figure who represents a path toward meaninglessness and suicide. Raskolnikov's very name means "schism,"<sup>113</sup> and this possibility between two paths drives much of the story as well as mirrors the internal conflict.

Raskolnikov is both drawn to and confused by Sonya. Since she has become a prostitute, he sees in her something of the same guilt as himself. He challenges her that she has killed someone through her actions as well: herself. They are alike then in their iniquity. The difference is that Sonya takes no pride in her state, does not consider herself to be without blame. She acknowledges the damage that she has done to herself and seeks repentance. It is this part which Raskolnikov cannot understand. Her religious nature and hope of redemption seem childish and silly to him – something he mocks on the visit before his confession.

The confession itself is a brilliant chapter abounding in nuance and subtleties of character. It is worth relaying the moment in full where Sonya first realizes what Raskolnikov has come to tell her and what he has done:

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<sup>113</sup> Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, xx.

“You’ve guessed?” he whispered at last.

“Lord!” a terrible cry tore itself from her breast. Powerlessly she fell onto the bed, face down on the pillows. But after a moment she quickly got up again, quickly moved closer to him, seized both his hands, and, squeezing them tightly with her thin fingers, as in a vise, again began looking fixedly in his face, as though her eyes were glued to him. With this last, desperate look she wanted to seek out and catch hold of at least some last hope for herself. But there was no hope; no doubt remained; it was all *so!* Even later, afterwards, when she remembered this moment, she found it both strange and wondrous: precisely why had she seen *at once* that there was no longer any doubt? She could not really say, for instance, that she had anticipated anything of the sort. And yet now, as soon as he told her, it suddenly seemed to her that she really had anticipated *this* very thing.

“Come, Sonya, enough! Don’t torment me!” he begged with suffering.

This was not the way, this was not at all the way he had intended to reveal it to her, but *thus* it came out.

As if forgetting herself, she jumped up and, wringing her hands, walked halfway across the room; but she came back quickly and sat down again beside him, almost touching him, shoulder to shoulder. All at once, as if pierced, she gave a start, cried out, and, not knowing why, threw herself on her knees before him.

“What, what have you done to yourself!” she said desperately, and, jumping up from her knees, threw herself on his neck, embraced him, and pressed him very, very tightly in her arms.<sup>114</sup>

This is, on my view, attended blame. This is an example of what it looks like for blame not to be theorized. As the passage continues Sonya tells him what he must do: that he must repent! Repent before all of the world. And so her blame does not lose its force; it does not lose the strength to call out wrong. Sonya’s blame is not weak or compromising on the moral issues at stake. Sonya

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<sup>114</sup> Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 411.

was also close friends with Lizaveta, the sister of the pawnbroker who was also killed, and so she has a personal loss at stake.

What we see from Sonya, though, is a blame which directs itself first at Raskolnikov. It is a blame which sees him. The first utterance she makes (aside from the "Lord!") is to say, "What have you done to yourself?" She is in this moment, present with him, and she is searching his gaze to know the truth; indeed, she figures it out before he even tells her. They are together in this moment.

As the novel continues, we see this one example expanded. Sonya continues to manifest to Raskolnikov in this way. She is present with him and to him, even after he confesses to the police and is sent to a labor camp. She goes with him and remains steadfast as a vision of mercy and repentance to him. Raskolnikov doesn't change in this moment with her, in the moment of the confession, but through her renewed efforts across time, through her attended blame, he is changed. There is a moment towards the end of the story where this change in Raskolnikov finally becomes manifest and Dostoevsky writes, "But he was risen and he knew it, he felt it fully with the whole of his renewed being..."

It is this sort of thing, then, this way in which Sonya presents herself to Raskolnikov, which I would suggest as one manifestation of attended blame as opposed to theorized blame. Whereas I have suggested theorized blame lends itself to depersonalized views of the other, attended blame is a way of confronting the other with their blame but by also seeing them personally, as

taking them as *who they are*, as being contextualized through a relationship, as exhibiting a concern for the other person while not disregarding the offense which brought about the need for blame in the first place. It is my hope that consideration of these sorts of issues, of recognizing the value of seeing others differently in our blaming encounters and of approaching others as persons, will lead us to more redemptive and reconciliatory practices of blame and judgment.

*Dry Eyes*  
By Josiah Yates

*Subtleties set by the window sill,  
Looking down at our wand'ring temples.  
Heads full of dead men's bones,  
Bones full of distance and shape  
And the black and white of daylight.  
No mist here, no shadow, rather  
The perfection of identity and  
Identifying.  
A head made clear and eyes that  
See sharp; see parts.*

*I have no responsibility to aspects –  
None that I can see.  
Action, word, deed – all before me;  
Utter simplicity.  
As I shift your blurs into my shapes  
You become it.*

*In between the gold and coffins  
Where faces are only lines  
Appears the moment of possibility  
To see the pillars and stones  
For more than they are –  
To stare until the eyes water  
And the vision shifts.*

*To raise the glass, the fresh air come in,  
The pieces, all disparate, all fractured  
Move beyond the shape. The head  
Is full of blurry dreams of more.  
The color...  
I see you – a world awakening.*

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