CHAPTER 10

THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF BLAME

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10.1 Introduction

Blame is commonplace in public and private life. We blame governmental officials and other public figures for high crimes and misdemeanours, unjust policies, and various kinds of indiscretion, for example, when we blame President Trump for his racist and xenophobic immigration policy, for obstructing the FBI investigation of Russian interference with our elections, for undermining democratic institutions and the rule of law, for condoning white supremacists, for his misogynist attitudes toward women, and for his coarsening of public discourse. We blame friends and acquaintances if we find their conduct or attitudes inappropriate or otherwise falling short of expectations, as when we censure a friend for being indiscreet with confidential information we shared with them. And we blame ourselves when we realize that we have behaved poorly, let others down, or been negligent—for instance, when one blames oneself for not being more considerate and supportive of a friend struggling through a difficult personal problem.

Blame is an important concept, in part because of the way it is related to other concepts and to our moral practices. As we will see, blame is intimately connected with being *blameworthy*. To be blameworthy is to be worthy of blame. It may be a condition of blaming someone for something that you regard her as blameworthy. But people can be blameworthy without it being appropriate to blame them. In some circumstances, it might be counterproductive to blame someone who is blameworthy, or it might be hypocritical to blame someone for a sin of which the appraiser himself is also guilty. These cases raise issues about the *ethics of blame* and who has the *standing to blame*. Blame can play a role in *moral education* as a way of reinforcing moral norms. Blame might need to be acknowledged but then set aside as part of *reconciliation*. Blame is also connected with *forgiveness* insofar as forgiveness seems to involve forswearing blame or waiving the right to blame. Blame and *excuse* are inversely related inasmuch as excuse renders blame inappropriate. For similar reasons, blame and *punishment* have been thought to be connected in a variety of ways, including the idea that punishment expresses blame and that punishment is justified only in cases in which the

person punished is an apt target of blame. So, blame is familiar and common and implicated in important ways with other practices, attitudes, and values.

And yet, while it is not generally difficult to identify instances of blame or to identify its importance to our moral practices, consensus on either a definition or a full account of the nature of blame has been remarkably elusive. There have been a number of suggestions as to what blame consists in, and, as we see it, these fall under three main methodological approaches.

The first approach is to offer a traditional definition or analysis, putting forward necessary and sufficient conditions of blame. Some analyses of blame conceive of it in terms of the appraiser's state of mind, focusing on the appraiser's negative evaluation of the target as blameworthy or her negative emotions and reactive attitudes, such as resentment and indignation. However, as we will see, these traditional analyses seem subject to counterexample in which we can judge blameworthy without blaming and blame without affective engagement.

If traditional analyses prove stubbornly elusive, a natural move is to turn to a different approach altogether. A second approach appeals to blame's functions (e.g. McGeer 2013).[1] Blame often has the function of moral communication between the wronged party or other interested parties and the target of blame (e.g. McKenna 2012; 2013). Blame might also serve related functions of identifying breaches of norms and reinforcing those norms. However, communicative and functional analyses of blame don't seem well positioned to handle cases of private blame, in which an aggrieved party blames a target without expressing that blame publicly.

A third view tries to accommodate the diversity of blame and its manifestations within a cluster or prototype analysis. On such a view, we understand the nature of blame by reference to the key features of its prototypes or paradigms, and then count as blame other instances that are sufficiently similar to the paradigms. These accounts improve on traditional accounts by allowing for more variation in instances. However, each ultimately faces the challenge of delivering sufficient unity and plausibility at the same time.

The key to progress, we think, lies in seeing that there is a *core* to blame that is present in all cases, even purely private mental instances of blame. The core, which is both necessary and sufficient for blame, is an aversive attitude toward the target that is predicated on the belief or judgement that the target is blameworthy. Once we identify this core, we can work outward to familiar expressions, manifestations, and functions of blame. Anyone who blames, in this sense, is disposed to manifest this blame in various ways in suitable circumstances, including by experiencing reactive attitudes, expressing their blame, making demands of the target of blame, and so on. These are normal manifestations of blame that constitute a non-accidental *syndrome*, but they lie downstream from the core of blame, and whether they occur will depend on the specific circumstances of the case. As we will show, the core of blame gives us an analysis of blame that we think is immune to counterexample, but the syndrome explains what is attractive in various multi-dimensional approaches, especially functional and prototype approaches. In this way, we aim to provide a middle ground between traditional analyses that offer an important unity and prototype and functional accounts that recognize the immense variety in particular instances of blame.

[1] A recent suggestion by Fricker (2016) combines a paradigm element with a functional element. We address this in more detail below.

We proceed as follows. In §10.2, we explore traditional analyses of blame in terms of the psychological states of appraisers, noting their susceptibility to counterexample. In §10.3 we explore the appeal of recent functional and communicative alternatives and explain why we think that they do not ultimately succeed. In §10. 4, we set out and defend the core and syndrome account. In §10.5, we address a challenge concerning circularity and elaborate some significant implications of the view. In §10.6, we address a key question for any account of blame, namely, in what sense, if any, it can be *deserved*, and explain how the core and syndrome account can answer this question, exploring both its comparative limitations and virtues. Finally, in §10.7, we show how this account of blame can provide guidance as to how to approach some important questions about the ethics of blame.

Before beginning our examination of blame, it is worth noting that none of these competing accounts are intended to capture every use of the concept of blame. For example, there is a notion of blame in which it is perfectly apt to blame the weather for a road closure. The notion of blame at stake here is one connected to a kind of blameworthiness that only agents have, and that presupposes that they are responsible agents whom it is appropriate to *hold to account*. This notion of responsibility is often referred to as "accountability" (e.g. Watson 1992/2004). As Watson notes, it is in connection with this notion of responsibility that concerns about fairness arise. For example, it might be unfair for us to hold responsible and blame a small child for not breaking up a fight between her siblings. Or we might debate whether it is fair to hold psychopaths responsible if they appear incapable of responding to good reasons.

10.2 Analysing blame in terms of the psychological states of appraisers

It is common to try to analyse blame in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions as a way of capturing what is essential to blame. Different conceptions of blame have been proposed, and most build on familiar and common dimensions of blame. Some of these conceptions conceive of blame in terms of the appraiser's state of mind, focusing on her negative evaluation of the target and the target's conduct as blameworthy or her negative emotions and reactive attitudes, such as resentment and indignation, toward the target and her conduct.

Some conceptions take affective states to be essential to blame. P. F. Strawson claimed that reactive attitudes are emotional responses directed at a target (whether oneself or others) in ways responsive to the perceived quality of will displayed by the target (Strawson 1963). Others have applied these Strawsonian ideas to blame, claiming that blame consists in certain negative emotions or reactive attitudes, such as anger, resentment, or indignation, directed at a target (e.g. Wallace 2013; Menges 2017). However, although the reactive attitudes are often implicated in blame, it's not clear that they are essential to blame, because it seems possible to blame without experiencing the reactive attitudes, as when one sometimes blames a child for whom one cares, or blames a political leader whose actions are distant in time or space (e.g. Sher 2006; 2013).

Other conceptions take cognitive states to be essential to blame. For example, some have claimed that blame consists in a *negative evaluation* of the target's conduct or attitudes (e.g.

Watson 1996/2004: 266). The negative evaluation might take the form of a judgement that the target acted with ill will or was blameworthy. Though blame typically does involve such cognitive assessments, it's not clear that such judgements are sufficient for blame. We might judge that a small child, say, or one struggling with a serious mental disorder, acts with ill will, but not blame them. Similarly, it seems coherent to say, "I judge him to be blameworthy, but I do not blame him" (e.g. Beardsley 1970). Thus, it has been thought that any cognitive conception must, at the least, be supplemented to capture the nature of blame.

One might explore other conceptions of blame in terms of the mental states of appraisers in terms of other candidate mental states or combinations (conjunctions or disjunctions) of mental states. But many of these other mental state analyses have been thought to be subject to counterexample as well (e.g. Coates and Tognazzini 2013b; Nelkin 2016). Moreover, conceptions of blame that focus on the mental states of appraisers seem to ignore the important social or interpersonal role that blame typically has. Reflection on the omission of the social dimension of blame in accounts that focus on the mental states of appraisers might make us treat blame as an essentially *communicative* act.

10.3 Communicative and functional paradigms for blame

Some writers have proposed that blame essentially involves some kind of *moral communication or address* (e.g. Watson 1987/2004: 230; MacNamara 2015). Some forms of communication are *unilateral* expressions of blame, perhaps in the form of *protest* (e.g. Smith 2013). But often, perhaps typically, blame is expressed communication by the appraiser that addresses the target or others. Often, the appraiser seeks to *open a dialogue* or *initiate a normative exchange* with the target (e.g. McKenna 2012; 2103; Fricker 2016). Blame might be a way of signalling to the target and others that the target has acted in ways that display *insufficient regard* for the interests or rights of the appraiser or others and that involve a breach of trust (e.g. Scanlon 2008: ch. 4). Sometimes, an expressive or communicative analysis incorporates a *functional dimension*, as when blame is understood to involve forms of interpersonal address that have the function of *norm enforcement* (e.g. Sunstein 1996; McGeer 2013; Malle, Guglielmo, and Moore 2014; Cushman 2014; Shoemaker and Vargas 2019).

Consider Michael McKenna (2012; 2013), who sees blame fundamentally as a move in a moral conversation. On his view, paradigms of blame are instances of expression and essentially communicative, while instances of unexpressed blame are non-paradigmatic and can be understood as derivative. This view thus combines a communicative aspect with a paradigm or prototype approach. According to McKenna, blame cannot be understood independently of the conversational moves that come before and after. He offers the following example of a moral exchange:

> *Moral contribution*: Leslie makes a moral contribution by telling a prejudicial joke.
> *Moral address*: By engaging in blaming practices, Daphne morally addresses Leslie.
> *Moral account*: Suppose Leslie offers Daphne an account of her behaviour and in doing so acknowledges the offence, apologizes, and asks for forgiveness. (McKenna 2012: 89)

Since there are many ways of expressing the same thing, and since there are many different expressions that would be felicitous in response to an opening of a conversation, this view can accommodate the idea that a number of responses to wrongdoing count as blame, without requiring that any particular kind of response is necessary. For example, on McKenna's view, taking up a reactive attitude like indignation is unnecessary. Blame, on this view, is a response to ill will as expressed in action in the first stage of the conversation, and *can* convey anger, shunning, and alienation as expressions of morally reactive attitudes (McKenna 2013: 132). For example, in the case at hand, this can include Daphne's failure to issue an expected invitation to lunch where this has a negative meaning for Leslie or her expression of indignation. This view thus has the advantage of being able to accommodate insights from a number of traditional accounts.

Miranda Fricker's general approach is remarkably similar (Fricker 2016). She focuses on what she calls "communicative blame" as the paradigm case of blame, and identifies its point as engendering a response of remorse in the offender. She then suggests that non-paradigmatic cases of blame nevertheless can be understood as having a "residue" of the communicative function and are close enough to the paradigm to count as blame. Very much like McKenna's approach, Fricker's appears to be able to accommodate a variety of responses as blame, while incorporating an element of a functional approach.

At this point, however, we might also ask whether we can say any more in general terms about what can count as blame, or whether there are general constraints on the content of the conversational move in question, and if so, what exactly they are. One concern is that without adding constraints, blame becomes *too* inclusive. For example, Daphne might quite intelligibly respond to an act of moral contribution with epistemic cautiousness, asking sincerely whether it was really intended, for example, or whether in the case at hand Leslie was aware of the implications of her utterance. In this case, it seems odd to say that Daphne's moral address constitutes blaming.[2] In other words, without further constraints on what makes a perfectly intelligible conversational move an instance of blame in particular, we do not yet have a complete account of blame. And yet it is possible that once we add constraints, the account might collapse into a necessary and sufficient conditions account, albeit one that is importantly different from traditional ones.

Interestingly, Fricker makes clear (at least implicitly) that she sees constraints on what counts as blame. For example, were we to find out that a "gentler" response achieved the aims of blame better than blame, we ought to do that instead *of blaming* (Fricker 2016: 174). This seems to help get the extension of blame right, but it isn't clear what grounds are available for the constraint, given Fricker's approach. To support this claim, we must assume a necessary condition that rules out the gentle responses Fricker mentions. But she claims at most one necessary condition (namely, a judgement of fault-finding). To reject a necessary condition

[2] It should be noted that McKenna (2012) requires for (overt) blame at least some necessary conditions—e.g. the belief on the part of the blamer that the target has committed a moral wrong (or bad act) and that the target endorses the reasons for moral wrong, as well as a disposition to react negatively. But note that McKenna's claim is that the unity of what can count as blame is given by conversational role. Further, it is important to note that the beliefs in question are consistent with doubt, so that it would seem that the cautious variant of Daphne described in the text could appear to count—counterintuitively, on our view—as blaming on McKenna's view.

ruling out such gentler responses, however, would allow for a significantly revisionist understanding of blame, with a far wider extension than the wide one we currently recognize.

Perhaps this is not a bad bullet to bite, or perhaps it can be avoided by embracing some additional necessary conditions on blame. For the claim that communicative blame is the central paradigm and explanatory basis for all cases of blame remains untouched by this worry and can be maintained even if we were to add additional necessary conditions. And indeed McKenna takes it to be an advantage that the central case is a case of overt and directed blame, one that literally involves a conversation. Cases of private or unexpressed blame can then be understood as degenerate cases of conversational blame.[3]

Yet, while expressed blame no doubt plays an important role in human life, we think that there is reason to doubt that this is the *only* kind of case that is central or explanatorily fundamental. In support of this contention that instances of private blame are also paradigmatic, we would point first to the wide variety and large number of cases that also seem to play central roles in human mental life, such as blaming the dead, blaming from afar, and blaming silently.

Now at this point, one can reasonably argue that it is not the number of instances of each that matters (and indeed McKenna concedes that private blame is more common), but rather which is more explanatorily fundamental. But further objections to taking expressed blame that is addressed to the offender as the sole prototype await. Julia Driver (2016) has argued in response that there is some reason to think that, developmentally, children are capable of blaming before they understand the conversational role of expressed blame. We can make sense of what young children are experiencing (and even doing) as blame without having to think of it in terms of possible manifestations in a conversation.[4] And this suggests that expressed blame is not explanatorily fundamental. While we have some sympathy with this line of reasoning, we leave as an open question whether children young enough to lack such understanding of behavioural and social manifestations of blame could really engage in blame. But whatever the facts are about child development, the case does suggest a thought experiment: could someone blame without understanding the social norms of blaming interactions? It seems quite plausible that someone—a child, say, or someone new to a social group—could do so.[5] Of course, it may be that someone with a full conceptual grasp of blame will also necessarily understand what is involved in (at least some) expressions of it.[6]

[3] See Fricker (2016), who similarly argues that cases of unexpressed blame nevertheless can be explained as having a "residue" of communication. And see McNamara (2013), writing about the reactive attitudes, for the view that they essentially "seek a response."

[4] See McKenna (2016) for a reply to Driver.

[5] We note, too, that there are small but significant differences among defenders of the view that prototype cases of blame (or the reactive attitudes) are ones in which blame is overt and fundamentally conversational or response-seeking. For example, Fricker claims that blame seeks the response of remorse on the part of the blamee, whereas McKenna's account leaves open a wider range of intelligible responses including offering justification. This is some evidence that whatever norms there are governing overt blame as it plays a role in interaction, someone could be forgiven for thinking that they are blaming without having (a full, anyway) understanding of the norms in question.

[6] As McKenna points out, this is arguably true for a whole range of emotions, including e.g. sadness, and not only the blaming ones such as resentment. But the fact that this is true of sadness, say, seems to provide support for the idea that public expressions of such emotions are *not* generally explanatorily fundamental. For in the case of sadness, it would seem to get things the wrong way around to assume that the prototype case is conversational or communicative. And if this is correct, then accepting that blame is fully understood only when one understands its characteristic expressions does not entail that

But it does not follow that expressions of blame are thereby explanatorily fundamental or, equally importantly, that expressed blame should be the prototype or paradigm.

We believe that this point is reinforced by contrasting the case of blame with other phenomena about which it seems much more compelling that the central case is one that is expressed—namely, promising and protesting. In the case of promising, the central case is surely one that involves expression, and indeed many leading accounts of promising take it to be a speech act of some sort that changes one's moral obligations. Now one might go further and claim that the *only* cases of promising are those that are expressed, and that a "private promise" is not a genuine promise at all. But one might argue that there could be private promises, as when someone says only to herself, thinking of her child, "I promise you, we will always take care of you." Still, the case is intelligible as a promise, we think, only because we can imagine her saying the very words, and making the internal commitment associated with them, to her child. Moreover, there is a way in which the private utterance is nevertheless *directed* to the child. (In contrast, it seems even less clear that one could promise someone who is dead.) Promising, then, seems a good candidate for thinking the central (if not the only) case is a case of expressed promising, where other cases such as silently promising a child might be modelled on a kind of conversation with a possible participant. Or consider protesting. Here matters are less obvious, but a good case can be made that the central case of protest involves (successful) communication, whether provided directly to the parties whose actions one protests or indirectly to members of the larger community.[7] One can silently protest, but we take this to be best understood as doing at least some of what one would do publicly for oneself—rehearsing the wrongs in question, declaring oneself unmoved toward acceptance of them, internally giving voice to demands, and so on. But note that the idea of internal voice already points to an internalized version of a communicative act.

Interestingly, forgiveness may also be better understood as communicative at its core in a way that blame is not. If blame and forgiveness were opposites, this would be problematic for our case that there is not only a communicative paradigm of blame. But forgiveness is (at best) only one way to cease to blame; one can cease to blame in many other ways, notably, by excusing and simply by letting go, which does not require any sort of communicative act, whether explicit or implicit.[8] The fact that ceasing to blame can take both communicative and non-communicative forms bolsters the case against the idea that the sole paradigm of blame is communicative.

Of course, many central cases of blame involve expressions of blame. But unlike the case of promising, there is nothing odd about the idea of private or unexpressed blame, and the idea needs no defence. And unlike the cases of both promising and protest, it does not seem essential to understand blame in reference to overt cases, or as an essentially internalized

expressed blame is the central, or prototype case of the category. McKenna (2016) seems to accept the first point, even for blame, arguing that his view only requires that *private* blame is not explanatorily fundamental.

[7] Consider recent protests, say, of President Trump's travel ban in the United States. Protesters were seeking action to overturn the ban, and showing their displeasure, but it is likely that many had no expectation of their protest being responded to by Trump himself.

[8] Note that on some views, forgiveness may be consistent with the continuation of at least some blame (e.g. Warmke 2014). For an in-depth treatment of letting go, see Brunning and Milam (in progress).

communicative act.[9] One reason for thinking that blame is different from promising and protesting in this way is that it seems very natural to come to *learn* that one has blamed one's parents for some omission over a long period of time, whereas the idea that one might come to learn that one has promised them something seems odd. The explanation is that promising is something like a speech act (which might have a correlate in inner speech), whereas blaming is not.

Let us sum up where we are. We have not shown that private blame is instead the central case, but aim only to cast doubt on the idea that expressed blame is uniquely suited for that job. And yet, if more paradigms are recognized, then even the special type of unity the prototype approach offered begins to dissipate, and it seems we will need to find unity somewhere else.

Before turning briefly to the functional approach, it is important to recognize one motivation, articulated by McKenna, in favour of the communicative paradigm approach that strikes us as particularly compelling—namely, to explain why we care about blame so much and why so much seems to be at stake. In particular, McKenna claims it to be an advantage of the communicative paradigm approach that it explains why we speak of desert and fairness in connection with blame. As McKenna notes, we might not care about private blame; it is not necessarily harmful, especially if not expressed. And so blame that is expressed seems more amenable to explaining what is at stake. It would be unfair and undeserved to be on the receiving end of expressions of blame which are often hurtful in both direct and indirect ways. In the end, we believe that the reasoning behind this motivation can be shown to be mistaken; but we acknowledge the challenge for any account of blame to explain why so much has been thought to be at stake. We return to this issue in §10.6.

We have seen that Fricker's account has both an element of a paradigm account and an element of a functional account in taking a central function of blame to be the eliciting of remorse. And others are even more clearly functional accounts (e.g. McGeer 2013). We believe, however, that functional accounts in general face a serious obstacle in the case of blame. To show why, we appeal to some empirical work showing that children learn more and internalize all sorts of norms—moral and otherwise—best when rewards and punishment are not external. At points, such research suggests that even blaming is not productive in this respect.[10] There is no doubt more in the way of research to be done, and it may be that some of the claims are based on a conflation of punishment and blame. But the conclusion is at least coherent, and educators and parents have taken it as the basis for implementing a non-blaming approach. The idea is that to achieve the ends often appealed to—remorse for wrongdoing on the way to better behaviour for the right reasons in the future, moral alignment, and social harmony—children (and adults) would be better served by a practice other than blame. For instance, in some cases parents and educators might be more successful modelling or encouraging appropriate attitudes and behaviour in children than blaming them for shortcomings. Imagine that we find out that it is true: blame is counterproductive if those are our aims. In that case, it would be odd to say that the point of what

[9] Notably, one necessary and sufficient conditions view of blame takes it to be a kind of protest (see e.g. Hieronymi, Smith, and Talbert). Thus, we take the very idea that expressed blame is not the sole paradigm to be one reason among others to reject this account of blame. At the same time, we believe that protest is linked to blame in important ways (we return to this point below).

[10] See e.g. Kohn (1993; 2006).

we had been doing was engendering remorse. And yet, if we have a purely functional view, we'd have to say that what we had been doing wasn't blame. But that seems unacceptably revisionary. Blame as a concept simply doesn't seem to be functional in this way. Blame may very well have important value, both intrinsic and instrumental, but it does not seem that its point or function is defining of it.

10.4 A CORE AND SYNDROME ACCOUNT

It's time to take stock. Existing traditional necessary and sufficient conditions analyses of blame seem problematic, and paradigm and functional accounts struggle to achieve both unity and plausibility at the same time. At this juncture, one might despair of providing any kind of analysis or conception of blame. Perhaps we should approach blame the way Justice Potter Stewart approached obscenity, when he famously despaired of defining obscenity but said "I know it when I see it."[11] Perhaps blame is unanalysable. However, we are more sanguine about blame than Potter Stewart was about obscenity.

Our approach begins by seeing that there is a *core* to blame that is present in all cases, even purely private instances of blame. The core, which is both necessary and sufficient for blame, is an aversive attitude toward the target that is predicated on the belief or judgement that the target is blameworthy. From the core, we can work outward to expressions, manifestations, and functions of blame. Because blame involves the belief that the target is blameworthy, which involves wrongdoing for which the agent was responsible, it is natural for appraisers not just to register private mental acts of blame but to be disposed to manifest this blame in various private and public ways in suitable circumstances—in particular, blamers are disposed to express their blame to the target and others, to protest the target's behaviour or attitudes, to engage the target in a normative exchange that acknowledges breached relations and can provide the target with an opportunity to express remorse and make amends, and to reaffirm and enforce the norms that have been breached. These are all normal expressions of blame that constitute a non-accidental *syndrome*, but they lie *downstream* from the core of blame. As with any psychological disposition, blame's dispositions may not manifest themselves in particular circumstances due to the operation of other dispositions and other forms of psychological interference. For instance, if the target holds significant power over the appraiser, fear or prudence might reasonably inhibit manifestation of the disposition to express blame and protest publicly. So, although elements of the syndrome non-accidentally co-occur with the core of blame, it is quite possible for there to be blame without one or more of these downstream expressions of blame.[12]

The tricky part in this account is specifying the core of blame. What exactly does it involve? Blame seems to involve a cognitive element insofar as an attitude won't count as blame unless the appraiser regards the target as blameworthy, which involves two components—the belief that the target acted wrongly or poorly and that the target was responsible for her wrongdoing or failing. There can be blame without the target actually

[11] Jacobellis v. Ohio, 378 U.S. 184 (1964), at 197 (Stewart J. concurring).

[12] For one interpretation of a syndrome as a non-accidental cluster of elements, no one of which is necessary to the concept or kind, see Boyd's (1990) discussion of homeostasis.

being blameworthy if the appraiser is unaware of the fact that the target did not commit the wrong or was not responsible for it. But it seems the appraiser has to believe that the target is blameworthy. In the face of recognition that the target is not genuinely blameworthy, blame tends to dissipate.

Could that be all there is to blame? Some have objected to such cognitive views of blame because they are too detached and not emotionally engaged. However, at this point, it's not clear that emotional detachment is good objection, because emotional engagement might just be part of the normal downstream manifestations of blame. Though it might seem possible to take a detached clinical view of blame, normally the belief that someone has acted badly leads to feelings of indignation, resentment, or disappointment and associated behaviours. If emotional engagement is downstream from the core, cases of emotionally detached blame needn't be counterexamples. Indeed, one might appeal precisely to emotional detachment, for instance, when one blames fictional characters or historical individuals from bygone eras, to motivate the purely cognitive account of the core.

Though one might defend a purely cognitive conception of the core of blame in this way, we think that blame does involve some kind of aversive attitude or emotion in addition to the judgement of blameworthiness. We identify two possibilities here.

One variant is that the judgement of blame is accompanied by a negatively valenced affective attitude. The precise attitudes involved in blame no doubt vary from case to case. The affective attitudes that one experiences in blaming fictional characters or historical figures are no doubt milder than the attitudes one experiences in blaming one's spouse for infidelity or one's friend for betrayal of trust. But we think that there is a kind of aversive attitude present in all cases of blame, even when one blames a fictional character or a long-dead historical figure. Consider some such blaming responses—our disapproval of Agamemnon for sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia to ensure safe travel to Troy, our response to the character Edward Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* for his self-absorption and his failure to appreciate Dorothea's promise and passions, our blame for Neville Chamberlain for his attempts to appease Hitler, and our condemnation of Hitler himself for the atrocities of the Holocaust. In our blaming responses in these cases, we are not just recording an evaluation to which we might be indifferent. In these and similar cases, we experience negatively valenced emotional attitudes ranging from disappointment, dismay, and frustration to indignation, repulsion, disgust, and horror. These attitudes will not be tied as tightly to action as the emotions in otherwise similar non-fictional or non-historical cases, but they are there, which is partly why fiction and history can move us. There may be no single emotional response common to all cases of blame, but they all seem to involve some negative or aversive emotional reaction, if only a fairly mild one. This leads to the idea that the core of blame consists in an aversive attitude toward a target that is based on an assessment of the target as blameworthy.[13] On this variation, the cognitive and affective core of blame gives us a fairly traditional analysis of blame that we think is immune to counterexample, but the syndrome

[13] It might be objected that our requirement of some aversive attitude or other is too broad, because it would commit us to treating fear or dread that is a response to wrongdoing as an instance of blame, which seems counterintuitive. But we don't think that this is a counterexample to our analysis. Fear or dread might be reactions to culpable wrongdoing, but they are responses to the danger posed by the target, not responses to culpable wrongdoing as such; they are not responses to wrongdoing qua culpable.

explains what is attractive in various multi-dimensional approaches, especially prototype approaches.[14]

On a second variation, the core of blame is an attitude of "holding against" which is sui generis in one important sense: it is not simply reducible to two separate attitudes, such as a judgement and an affective attitude. But this does not mean that it is unanalysable or that there is not more to be said about its nature. It is to say that it is a kind of stance, or, to borrow a phrase from Eric Schwitzgebel (2013), a "posture of the mind" or a (possibly) temporary way of living. It will be helpful to consider other examples of stances or attitudes that do not appear to simply reduce to an aggregate of familiar ones of belief, desire, or affect. To take an example of Schwitzgebel's, "to love baseball, too, is to live a certain way. It is to enjoy watching and participating in baseball games, to leave room for baseball in one's plans, to talk baseball with other aficionados, to relish the onset of the season, to care intensely about the outcome of certain games, and so forth — or at least to be disposed in most of these directions, ceteris paribus" (2013: 13). Similarly, an influential set of views about the nature of caring takes it that to care about something is to possess a number of dispositions of various kinds—emotional, cognitive, motivational, and deliberative—and one might see this proposal on the same sort of model. For example, on Agniezka Jaworska's account,

> the carer is disposed to worry when the object of care is in danger, to be relieved when the object escapes danger, to be sad when the object of care suffers a setback, to hope that things will go well for the object, to be happy when the object is flourishing, and so on. The carer's emotions and emotional dispositions form a systematic pattern focused on the object and having some elements of this pattern normatively commits the person to having the other elements. For example, if you worry when a certain object is in danger, you should to be relieved when this danger passes. The motivational dispositions parallel the emotional ones: a carer is disposed to act to promote and protect the flourishing of the object of care.[15]

On Seidman's (2016) view, what unifies these dispositions is that the carer takes the object to be reason-giving in a variety of ways. In this way, caring can also be seen as a kind of stance that implicates a variety of dispositions. Finally, to admire someone plausibly requires having certain beliefs about the positive traits possessed by the object of one's admiration, while one's admiration does not reduce to such beliefs, or even to one's beliefs and one's positive affect toward the person as a result. To admire someone seems essentially to include a

[14] On this variation of the core and syndrome view, the *core* bears some resemblance to the traditional reactive attitude account already described, for which it seemed that there are natural counterexamples. One key difference (beyond the explicit recognition of a syndrome in addition to the core) is that on the traditional view, the attitudes in question are typically limited to a narrow range, including resentment, indignation, and guilt. In contrast, in this variation of the core and syndrome view, the negative attitudes can range across a wider set of negatively valenced attitudes, ruling out only indifference. This variation of the core and syndrome view also shares some features with Sher's account of blame, according to which blaming is having 'affective and behavioral dispositions' that 'can be traced to the combination of a belief that that person has acted badly or has a bad character and a desire that this not be the case' (Sher 2006: 114). Though Sher's language suggests that if anything is the core of blame it is the affective and behavioural dispositions rather than the attitudes, one might see it as a cousin of the core attitude account if one were to reverse this order. Importantly, however, the views would differ significantly in what they take the cognitive content of the relevant attitude(s) to be. See Smith (2013: 35–7) for a compelling response that targets the specific content rather than the structure of Sher's view.

[15] Jaworska (2019). See also Helm (2001) and Jaworska (2007).

set of dispositions to emulate, to sing their praises, and so on.[16] Of course, these dispositions might be masked or blocked in any number of ways.

On Schwitzgebel's particular account of attitudes (or postures of mind), to have any attitude is to have a dispositional profile, together with meeting additional conditions specific to the attitude-type. Adapting this model for a second variation on the core and syndrome account, we can identify the core of blame with a stance of holding against that is partly constituted by a distinctive set of dispositions and that depends on the belief that the object of blame is blameworthy. We do not claim that all attitudes fit this sort of model, nor even that the core of blame does. But we find the idea that to blame is to have an attitude in this sense to be one worth pursuing further.

Both of these variations of core and syndrome retain the basic structure of a core and downstream manifestations, and both take the epistemic commitment to the blameworthiness of the object to be part of the core, thus providing a key link between blame and blameworthiness.

10.5 Blame and blameworthiness

At this point, a question naturally arises about the relationship between blame and blameworthiness. Blameworthiness on its face is to be understood in terms of blame; in fact, blameworthiness is fittingness for blame.

> The Biconditional: X is blameworthy for action or omission A if and only if it is fitting to blame X for A.

It seems that *what it is* for a person to be blameworthy just is for it to be fitting for the person to be blamed. The biconditional just elucidates the concept of blameworthiness. So a natural worry arises for the core and syndrome view, which takes it that blame is itself understood in terms of (perceived) blameworthiness. We have a kind of circle and now face the question about whether this is problematic. Some circles are vicious, but others might be elucidatory, and the challenge for the core and syndrome view is to resist the charge of viciousness.

A first answer is to make room for at least a slightly larger circle by moving from the presupposition of blameworthiness to a presupposition of responsible wrongdoing.[17] Yet, we believe the concept of responsibility and blameworthiness are themselves connected, in that

[16] See Linda Zagzebski (2015) for the idea that admiration has such a motivational profile.

[17] One might instead attempt to move to a different content altogether; for example, the belief that the target of one's blame acted with ill will. But this seems insufficient to capture the extension of blame, even when we add various affective elements. For we sometimes judge that small children or those who struggle with mental disorders act with ill will, and feel quite negative feelings, and yet rightly resist the idea that we are thereby blaming them in a sense that is related to holding them to account. It is also worth noting that other views also take this (or something quite close) as a presupposition. For example, as we saw, Fricker adopts the condition of "finding fault." Randolph Clarke, writing about guilt (which might seem to be an instance of self-blame), argues that its 'constitutive thought' is that one is blameworthy for something (2016: 3). As Clarke argues, any other thought will seem to fall short insofar as other thoughts, such as that what one did was wrong, are consistent with excuse, and so seem not to fully capture the constitutive thought of guilt.

being responsible makes one a candidate for blameworthiness (and praiseworthiness). So in this respect a circle remains, albeit a larger one. Is this large enough? One might worry that the circle is not large enough to be truly informative, and that what is really needed is more elucidation of the nature of both blame and blameworthiness. Fortunately, we believe that there is more to say in response to this worry.

While it is true that what it is to be blameworthy is to be fit for blame, the *conditions* of blameworthiness, and more generally of responsibility—what *makes* one fit for, or an apt candidate for, blame and praise, respectively—can both be understood in terms completely independently of blame. On the view we favour and have defended in detail elsewhere (Brink and Nelkin 2013; Brink 2021), being blameworthy is a matter of having had, and failed to take, a fair opportunity to avoid wrongdoing, where this in turn requires having both a sufficient degree of normative competence and situational control. Being responsible for wrongdoing, on this account, is a matter of the agent having suitable *capacities* and *opportunities* for acting well. The particular details are not essential for our purposes here, however. What is crucial is that what makes one blameworthy, or, more generally, responsible, is something quite independent of the response of blame.[18] Thus, if a blamer must presuppose that one is responsible for one's wrongdoing by meeting whatever the (response-independent) conditions are for being so responsible, then we can have a non-vicious and informative account of both blame and blameworthiness.

Further, one of the virtues of the core and syndrome view is that the complete account of blame goes well beyond the core to the manifestations and expressions to which it gives rise. Putting this point together with the previous one—that we have an independent grasp of what *makes* agents responsible and blameworthy—we can see that, though we understand the blameworthy and blame in terms of each other, there is no simple and small circle connecting them. Thus, we take it that the core and syndrome view offers an informative account of the nature of blame, consistent with an equally informative account of the nature of blameworthiness.[19]

[18] E.g. one might take it that what makes someone blameworthy on a given occasion is their failure to act with due regard to others; this condition on what makes someone blameworthy makes no reference, implicit or explicit, to the response of blame.

[19] It is worth noting an important commitment in our answer to the circularity worry, namely, that it is possible to identify *response-independent* conditions that make us blameworthy when we are. There is a lively debate about whether this is the right approach to blameworthiness, and while a full adjudication of this debate is beyond the scope of this chapter, we can briefly explain here how it interacts with the circularity worry. On a *response-dependent* view of the blameworthy, being blameworthy and responsible can *only* be understood in terms of the regular blaming responses to the relevant behaviour. For example, on David Shoemaker's (2018) view, 'The blameworthy […] *just is* whatever merits anger (the angerworthy); that is, someone is blameworthy […] for X if and only if, *and in virtue of the fact that*, she merits anger for X' (p. 508). Crucially, on this sort of view, there are no conditions for being blameworthy that can be captured independently of the meriting of blaming responses. This sort of view might seem to have an advantage over response-independent views insofar as it can avoid this circularity worry altogether by simply rejecting the idea that blame presupposes a judgment of blameworthiness, as Shoemaker does. However, this feature of the view comes at a cost. In particular, without requiring a presupposition of blameworthiness, we are left with an intuitively over-inclusive category of the blameworthy. The challenge is to find a way to narrow the appropriate objects of blame (in the form of anger) so that not just anything goes.

To sum up, we take seriously the circularity challenge, but we think that it can be met in part by appealing to the explanatory resources of a response-independent account of what makes people blameworthy when they are.

10.6 Blame, desert, and accountability

Recall that we have been interested in blame and responsibility in the accountability sense, the sense in which to hold responsible is to hold to account, and the sense in which questions of fairness can arise. We now return to a central motivation that some prototype theorists have offered for focusing on expressed blame. It is very natural to think that desert and blameworthiness are connected in an intimate way. In fact, the relation "worthy of" might most naturally be thought of as precisely the "deserving of" relation. If it were, this would make sense of much of the association in the literature of desert and blameworthiness, and it fits with ordinary ways of talking.[20] But note that "desert" has various meanings itself. A painting can be said to deserve our admiration or our indifference in a different way from a person who has committed a horrible wrong can be said to deserve a certain sort of response. As Feinberg (1970) points out in his seminal article on desert, when one is deserving of something for acting culpably, one deserves a form of treatment that sets back one's interests or harms one in some way. On the flip side, when one acts very well, one can be deserving of a positive change to one's interests. Desert in the realm of responsibility seems to be valenced in precisely this way. And we should understand desert in this way here, because only if we do so can we understand why questions of fairness arise when it comes to attributions of desert. If nothing bad (or good) will happen to you or others if everyone gets what they deserve, it is hard to complain of unfairness. And yet, as McKenna points out, we take there to be a great deal at stake when it comes to attributions of blameworthiness and, relatedly, desert, and we naturally raise questions of fairness. Thus, we have good reason to understand desert in a way that requires that what one deserves is appropriately valenced with respect to affecting one's interests, in response to what one has done.

Now we can begin to see the motivation for putting expressed blame front and centre. It is that *un*expressed blame does not seem essentially harmful to its object, and yet, as we just saw, desert seems precisely to be valenced in this way. How then can blameworthiness be understood as related to desert in the right way unless blame is itself something harmful? McKenna makes a strong case that unexpressed blame simply doesn't do this job well—it is often not even noticed by its targets, and sometimes even when it is noticed, it is not at all harmful to them. Thus, the core view, which takes the core of blame itself to be a mere attitude, faces a challenge that prototype views, in focusing on expressed blame, appear to avoid.

While we understand this motivation, it turns out to be possible to deploy it *against* the conversational prototype view. For expressed blame is not always bad or harmful either. If Donald Trump were to tweet an expression of blame toward me, it might be a kind of badge of honour and nothing bad for me at all.[21] So sometimes expressed blame is not harmful.

[20] See Pereboom (2014) for the view that the kind of responsibility (and blameworthiness) at the core of debates about free will and responsibility is precisely a notion of "basic desert."

[21] See Nelkin (2013) for additional examples in which blame and resentment are not necessarily harmful to its object. Interestingly, Feinberg (1971) characterized the object deserved as what *most* people

We also take it that unexpressed blame *is* sometimes harmful. For example, if someone close to us blames us, even if it is never expressed or manifested in any behaviour at all, that can make our lives go worse than they otherwise would. Thus, the distinction between situations in which blame is harmful and those in which it is not crosscuts the distinction between expressed and unexpressed blame. The communicative paradigm approach is not in a particularly good position to explain why desert and fairness have been associated with blame.

But this reasoning simply shows that the challenge faces *any* account of blame, including the core view. For if instances of blame are not harmful, then we simply do not have a perfect correlation between appropriate blame and a deserved setback of interests in response to wrongdoing. The fact that the core view is not in a worse position than the prototype conversational or communicative views does not go very far in answering the challenge.

One kind of response to this challenge is to locate a *kind* of blame that is essentially harmful. Andreas Carlsson (2017) offers an intriguing proposal: focus on self-blame and, in particular, guilt. For guilt is a kind of blame that is essentially painful, and so, on his view, fundamentally deserved and of which culpable wrongdoers are *worthy*. But even if this view is correct, it will not provide a complete solution. For on this view, it isn't blame per se that is deserved. It is blame of a special sort. So if we are to understand blameworthiness as itself a claim about desert of blame in the robust sense at hand, we must acknowledge a revisionary approach to our ordinary ways of understanding blameworthiness.

We think the best approach to the problem is to acknowledge that blameworthiness is, at its most general, *fittingness* for blame, and not desert in the robust sense of being valenced in a way that affects one's interests for better and worse. What one deserves in that sense and appropriate blame can simply come apart. Nevertheless, blame and desert are essentially connected, albeit not in that most direct way. One who is blameworthy is also, and for the same reasons, deserving of a setback of interests or a harmful response. This is because the same conditions that make one blameworthy also make one deserving in this way. Quite often, blame is itself a setback of interests; but even where it is not (e.g. the Trump tweet case), it does not follow that one is not deserving.

On this picture, we can explain how, consistent with the core view of blame, blameworthiness can be essentially related to desert in the robust sense associated with debates about the very possibility of moral responsibility. The relationship is not identity, but the very conditions in virtue of which blame is fitting make one deserving of a negative effect on one's interests, as well.

It is important to add that being deserving of a certain response does not thereby make it good that one gets it.[22] Being deserving can be part of a reason under certain circumstances for ensuring that someone gets what they deserve. And in this way, there remains much at stake on the question of whether anyone is deserving of anything. Thus, this picture

would find unpleasant, rather than as what the deserving person would find unpleasant or what would be harmful to her. This is one way to accommodate the cases at hand, while still linking desert to setting back or promoting interests in a general way. But it seems problematic to say that a person deserves something that might be quite beneficial to her personally for an egregious wrongdoing simply because most others would find it harmful.

[22] See some more detailed reasons for this view in Nelkin (2013; 2019).

preserves the idea that much is at stake when it comes to blameworthiness and fitting blame, and it is a picture consistent with the core view of blame. At the same time, it is worth noting that much of this picture can be adopted by other accounts as well.

Finally, even if we were to reject this picture of the relationship between blame and desert, we would be back where we began, with neither the prototype conversational view nor the core and syndrome view having an advantage over the other along this dimension.[23] And it is hard to see how any answer that the prototype view could offer would be unavailable to the core and syndrome view.

10.7 Toward an ethics of blame

The core of blame, on our view, involves a belief that the target of blame is blameworthy. However, it is important to add that blameworthiness is necessary but not sufficient for blame being *fully* justified—that is, justified on balance or all things considered. Some blameworthy actions should not be blamed, perhaps because doing so would be hypocritical or counterproductive or would cause more harm than good or because blame should be tempered with mercy or forgiveness. But if blameworthiness does not entail justified blame, how are the two connected?

If something is blameworthy, then there is a pro tanto case for blaming it. This pro tanto case for blame implies that blame should be withheld only for sufficient countervailing reasons. If so, blameworthiness is always a reason to blame, even if in particular cases that reason is overridden by countervailing considerations against blaming. This means that while desert is necessary and sufficient for blameworthiness, it is necessary, but not sufficient, for blame.

When we should blame raises issues about the *ethics of blaming*. If culpable wrongdoing or failing is always a pro tanto reason to blame, what kinds of considerations interfere with and possibly defeat the pro tanto case for blaming the blameworthy? In principle, there could be many kinds of countervailing considerations, and it would be difficult to catalogue all of them. Here are a few salient possibilities.

First, *blame might be costly* emotionally or otherwise. Sometimes the costs are borne by the appraiser, sometimes by the target, sometimes both, and even sometimes by third parties. We are all familiar with the adage that one must pick one's battles, and this advice applies no less to the practice of blame. Presumably, the balance of reasons to blame depends on both the degree to which the target is blameworthy and the costs of blaming, especially to the appraiser and third parties.

Second, many have thought that forgiveness involves the *forswearing of some or all blame*, and so the ethics of blaming will depend on the ethics of forgiving. Forgiveness itself seems

[23] E.g. an alternative picture takes it that the relationship of desert is nothing more than fittingness after all; but blameworthiness entails not only desert of blame but also desert of treatment that negatively affects one's interests. This picture, too, captures the idea that much is at stake in the debate over whether anyone can be blameworthy, and that questions of fairness naturally arise. But this picture would be available to the core and syndrome view, as well.

to presuppose blameworthiness. It makes no sense to forgive another unless one regards the target of forgiveness as blameworthy. If an agent has committed no wrong or is fully excused for that wrong, there is nothing to forgive. Forgiveness raises important issues about who has standing to forgive, the conditions under which forgiveness is appropriate, whether forgiveness is ever mandatory or always remains discretionary, how (if at all) the decision of one party to forgive affects the decision of other parties to forgive, and how to measure the strength of the reasons to forgive (e.g. Hughes and Warmke 2017; Chaplin 2019; Milam 2022). These are complex and difficult issues. Though they interact with the ethics of blaming, they lie largely outside our focus here.

Third, it is sometimes said that some people lack the *standing to blame* in particular cases (Scanlon 2008: 175–9; Wallace 2010; Bell 2013; Watson 2013). In the law, standing depends on whether a party has a sufficient *stake in* or *relation to* a legal matter to bring suit. Standing to blame would seem to involve the question whether someone has a sufficient stake in or relation to an offence to blame the wrongdoer. An appraiser's lack of standing to blame may disqualify her from expressing blame publicly. If someone lacks standing in relation to a wrong and a target, that presents a reason why that person should not blame the target publicly. For instance, it is sometimes said that hypocrites lack the standing to blame others for sins of which they themselves are guilty. One might claim that it was hypocritical for President Trump to blame Al Franken for sexual misconduct, because there is strong evidence that Trump is himself a serial sexual harasser. If so, Trump lacked standing to blame Franken for sexual assault. Though it's plausible that hypocrites and those complicit in an offence lack standing to blame, it's not clear who does have standing. Standing to blame may vary with the nature of the wrong or failing. If the wrong has a victim, the victim may have some special standing to blame. But if the wrong is a moral wrong, then it may be that any member of the moral community has some standing to blame, even if the victims of the wrong have special standing to blame. There might be a presumption of standing, which has specific defeaters, such as hypocrisy or complicity. It's important to note that standing to blame is appraiser-relative, so that one person's lack of standing need not imply that another person lacks standing. Hypocrites might lack standing to blame, but others do not. Moreover, even if others lack standing to blame, that does not mean that the culpable wrongdoer is not blameworthy. Indeed, it might be that the disqualification for blame that lack of standing generates itself is only pro tanto reason not to blame. If there is a serious wrong for which a wrongdoer is fully culpable, and there is no one free from sin to blame him, it might be permissible for a fellow sinner to blame the target, especially if in so doing the appraiser acknowledges that she is not free from sin herself. In such cases, it might be better for blame to come from a remorseful and reformed sinner than to forego blame altogether.

The nature and strength of reasons that might compete against the pro tanto case to blame the blameworthy will undoubtedly depend on how we understand blame itself. If blame has an essential function, such as norm enforcement or facilitating reconciliation, then there may be special reasons not to blame in particular cases if that would not be conducive to reinforcing norms or facilitating reconciliation. So, the ethics of blame returns us to issues about what is essential to blame. Selecting a particular account of blame will not by itself generate principles for the ethics of blame. But it can guide our inquiry in particular ways.

10.8 Conclusion

We have presented a core and syndrome account of blame, arguing that it compares favourably to a new set of views that have moved the debate over the nature of blame forward after it seemed that every traditional account was vulnerable to counterexamples of some sort or other. Many details remain to be filled in. Our aim here is to have shown the promise of the approach, and to show that a core and syndrome account has the advantages of providing more unity and less likelihood of being undermined by recent empirical results than prototype and functional views, respectively, and to show that it can account just as well for the weightiness of questions surrounding the very possibility of blameworthiness, moral desert, and fitting blame.

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