

Empathetic Blame:
Moral Evaluation in the Face of Luck

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Introduction

When somebody performs an act that we consider morally wrong, we like to think them blameworthy. That is, in a paradigm featuring choices, the options in which can be morally good or bad, being made by freely choosing agents, who too can be morally good or bad, this certain somebody has chosen a bad option, made a move towards being a bad person, and thus opened themselves up to blame. What it means to be open to blame, or even what exactly it means to blame someone, has been a central topic of historical metaethical debate, gaining steam in its contemporary iteration after P.F. Strawson's *Freedom and Resentment* in 1963. The positions range from minute manipulations of the definition of blame to wholesale rejections of blame, responsibility, and agency. Perhaps one need not be a free agent to be blameworthy; perhaps they need not have exhibited anything about their deep, underlying moral character. Whatever your position may be, there's no doubt that blame is a very particular, and influential, component of our moral lives, and that the dialogue ushered in by Strawson was a necessary one.

What is sometimes forgotten, though, is that *Freedom and Resentment* is not an essay explicitly about blame, at least in the way that, say, this thesis is. Strawson surely sought to propose his "reactive attitude" conception of blame, which will be explained in greater detail below, but above all, he sought a critique of the state of discourse surrounding moral responsibility at the time of his writing. To him, all talk of moral responsibility had become talk of vague metaphysical concerns—how can we be responsible in the face of physicalist determinism? What is the function of blame in the development of a society? All these sorts of questions forgot something essential about moral responsibility: that it is only sensical when manifested as things like blame and praise, and that blame and praise are only sensical when understood as interactions between sets of individuals. In the absence of an understanding of scenarios in which one person blames another for a certain act or feature, those more grandiose claims like "we can't be responsible if determinism is true" stop holding weight. Responsibility and blame are moments of interpersonal interaction, not parameters in a theory.

Conveniently, as philosophers are wont to do, many ethicists have skirted around this major critique of blame discourse to instead only see Strawson as a sort of blame theorist. They discuss the merits and faults

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of his “reactive attitudes” and pit them against other theories, tying themselves in knots and talking past each other. It is often forgotten that, just as the thesis of determinism is hardly relevant to an individual trying to figure out whether or not to blame another, the considerations at play simply don’t map onto the concerns of real individuals really blaming each other. A consideration that I believe *should* be relevant is at least some level of internal coherence. Just as an overly abstract conception of blame is unhelpful, so too is one which offers guidance for the real world but ends up failing according to its own criteria. Both such forms of unhelpfulness will be the focus of Part I of this thesis. In it, I will describe two widely accepted preconditions for blame, then how those hit a brick wall in the form of Thomas Nagel’s formulation of “circumstantial moral luck.” I’m not the first person to recognize this issue, and as such will run through the foremost proposed solution which, I argue, is unhelpful in the other way—it’s overly abstract; fun to think about, but implausible to execute.

Having stretched these problems as far as they can go, to the point of crisis, I will begin rebuilding in Part II. Eschewing the rigid rules and metaphysical concerns that lay at the core of the problematic positions of Part I, I generate an interpretation of blame constructed out of building blocks from Strawson, Hume, and Scanlon. The result is blame that is based in, and resulting from, the phenomenology of interpersonal interactions—specifically two parts: empathy and self-reflection. I then go on to describe how this interpretation of blame relates to various inquiries about the preconditions for blame, including those brought up in Part I.

This all becomes a rather difficult balancing act for a few reasons, not the least of which is deciding how wide a scope to have. Of course, indulging in every possible question one might have about blame would leave me in that incredibly abstracted and intellectualized position I’ve already criticized, not to mention with a multi-volume opus on my hands. Still, I’ve mentioned that many problems of contemporary blame discourse result from philosophers talking past each other. Without fully sketching out the implications of dissenters’ objections, they engage with only a small portion of what might be relevant to blame, and leave many stones unturned. With that in mind, I think it would be helpful, before I proceed to Part I, to respond to two questions that preclude any discussion of blame: whether there’s any reason to blame at all, and how

we would go about changing the way we blame even if we wanted to. In the absence of a satisfactory answer to these, the whole rest of this thesis becomes superfluous.

i. | Is There Any Good to Blame?

One thing that is often dismissed without engagement is whether we'd be better off without any blame at all, but it is a fair question to ask. Coates and Tognazzini summarize the point of many ethicists by stating "when we say that blame is central to human relationships, we don't mean that it *belongs* at the center. We are merely making the undeniable point that we are (in fact) beings who evaluate, react, and respond to each other (and ourselves) along various normative dimensions."¹ While many have argued over the question of whether we ever *could* stop blaming, its answer has little bearing on whether we *should* stop, or reduce, blaming. Arguing for the benefit of blame solely on the legs of its apparent necessity seems to me to be shakier than even the simplistic position that "we should all stop blaming because it feels really bad when someone blames me."

Moreover, arguments against blame need not always be so simplistic. Many of them seem deeply tied to widely beloved notions of "turning the other cheek" or denying a lust for retribution. The film *The Tree of Life* powerfully illustrates "the way of grace" as one which "accepts being slighted, forgotten, disliked. It accepts insults and injuries,"² and, when it's all said and done, is the only way to transcend one's nature and make it to heaven. If we lionize those who respond to wrongdoing with forgiveness, why are we then spending so much time figuring out the right way to blame?

A natural starting place is with George Sher's aptly-titled *In Praise of Blame*. In his picture, to blame someone involves the belief that they have violated morality, but that is not enough, for moral judgments are fundamentally different from other judgments.

The claim that a cat is worthy of being judged white is simply a roundabout way of saying that the cat *is* white, but the claim that a person is blameworthy is not just a roundabout way of saying that the person has flouted or ignored, or is disposed to flout or ignore, a certain (type of) moral reason. Just

what the attribution of blameworthiness adds [...] it clearly goes far beyond the truth of the relevant belief.³

This additional element is the *desire* that one not have acted badly. Thus, to blame another is not only to have a commitment to certain morals as matters of fact, but to desire for them to be adhered to. Sher engages with certain objections and seeks to expand this desire in a number of ways, but for present purposes this core position is enough: if one holds that morals can be applied to others as to oneself and are essentially prescriptive, an affirmation of blame is an affirmation of morality. “The person who does act on [moral] principles but does not care if their demands have been flouted or ignored in the past,” he writes, “[...] is *ipso facto* not as committed to them as their justification warrants.”⁴ A life without blame is, in a sense, a life disconnected from those very morals which offer the motivation for living.

Christopher Evan Franklin continues on a similar point. He cites Ivan’s famous claim in *The Brothers Karamazov* that, despite God’s offering him a ticket to heaven by way of forgiving sins, if it means he will lose his rage at those who commit atrocities, he will have to “most respectfully return him the ticket.”⁵ To Franklin, the strength of Ivan’s passion is what separates him from someone like Sher. Sher’s “argument, at best, establishes that the desire that someone not have acted badly is conceptually tied to a commitment to morality.”⁶ But this is not enough. Franklin agrees that blame involves more than belief, but disagrees that desire is sufficient to fill the gap. Instead, following what I’ll describe as the reactive attitude camp of blame,* there must be some strong sense of resentment or indignation involved in a blame act.

Towards the end of tying together *this* conception of blame with morality, Franklin follows Kant and differentiates “valuing” something from merely “judging something to be valuable.” Because of the plurality of valuable things in the world, we’re forced to choose certain ones that we actually value, which involves a certain level of deliberative and emotional attachment. Other people are the type of thing, just in virtue of our being rational moral agents, we *ought* to value, not simply find valuable. How this connects to blame: in addition to the Kantian claim that when we fail to blame the wrongdoer we express an understanding of them

* For an elaboration on this camp’s position, see “What Are We Doing When We Blame” in Part II.

as valueless or not worth blaming—a claim that many have used to defend blame—such a failure also expresses an understanding of the *victim* as valueless. “In failing to blame the murderer, we (all things being equal) fail to value the victim,”⁷ he argues. To not blame a wrongdoer is to acquiesce to their devaluation of what or who has been mistreated, and to blame without the proper resentment or indignation is to assert that what or who has been mistreated is *valuable*, but that we don’t *value it*.

If one is unconvinced by these appeals to the inextricability of blame and morality, they may turn to something like T.M. Scanlon’s defense of blame, which rests on its connection to forming meaningful relationships. This defense, and the conception of blame feeding it, will be explicated in Part II, as it feeds well into the new interpretation that I develop.

The final point on this matter I will give to Roger Wertheimer, who investigates how one even *could* go about supporting or opposing blame. First, he rejects a justification for condemnation based on end result. “Penalties may be unproblematic when their motivations are purely pragmatic. [...] Using carrots and sticks to motivate men needn’t be worse than moving mules that way. It may be better.” Then he continues, “but we’re not playing games when we condemn.”⁸ If we’re talking purely about condemnation in its purest form, without a necessary extension into publicity or punishment—if we’re just talking about the hostility that lies deep in the heart, it seems we need something more than prudence to work with.

The first step he takes is an analysis of meanings, ending up in a place similar to Franklin. “The distinctive responses to immoralities are emotional, like indignation, resentment, guilt, remorse, and (moral) shame, attitudes whose common core component is condemnation. Condemnation defines morality: it shows what ‘moral’ means to us, by showing what immoralities mean to us.”⁹ Thus, morality is dictated by what we emotionally condemn. But it is what this claim leads him to that I am more interested in. Because morality itself gets determined by our condemnation, any “calls to cut out all condemning must come from spaces beyond good and evil.”¹⁰ If we follow Wertheimer, then, anyone who finds themselves arguing against blame as a whole must be wary that they’re not actually finding fault in the moral framework that a certain version of blame is advocating. It makes no sense to “blame the practice of blame,” which—if morality is defined by blame—is exactly what those claiming to find moral fault in blame are doing.

ii. | *How Would We Go About Changing the Way We Blame?*

Next, we move to the most practical question: how do we become better blamers? Perhaps, unconvinced by the arguments presented in the last subsection, becoming a better blamer, to you, means becoming one who blames as little as possible. Else, you may simply be wondering how to better execute the various conceptualizations of blame that will be posited throughout this thesis, including my own. By the time you reach the end of this work, it should be easy to understand, for example, that Strawson believes that one is blameworthy when they are the appropriate target of certain reactive attitudes like resentment and indignation. But how do we come to feel those attitudes at the appropriate things? Or perhaps we assent to a Christian paradigm of blame centered on notions of reward and punishment, Heaven or Hell. But surely different blameworthy acts contribute more or less to being punished. How do we become better judges of such a thing? How, in other words, do *we* better approximate the judgment *God* would give?

Few philosophers have addressed this question in any sort of direct fashion. Things like teaching the ability to critically reason or express autonomy are occasionally cited, but these are rather vague. Perhaps, in an indirect sense, a well-rounded education centered on critical reasoning and autonomy would give one a leg up both on which conception of blame they find to be the best *and* how to go about executing that conception of blame, but the suggestion seems hardly helpful. An equally distant response, though I believe a bit more to the point, is to simply educate oneself on the different ways in which people conceive of blame, say, by reading some of the papers and books cited in this thesis. In typical discussion, blame is often left unexamined, for it is simply considered to be something like an outgrowth of morality, which is more worth talking about. For many reasons, the greatest of which is the fact that blame is fundamentally an aspect of concrete interpersonal life and morality is fundamentally at least a little abstract, this is not true. One learns a lot, and subsequently is able to improve a lot, when they engage in dialogue about blame itself. While we can, and do, function in the world with an either undetermined or incompletely acted upon moral code, we cannot do the same in regards to blame—“abstaining from all value judgment is not a live option.”¹¹ Thus, the

foremost step in becoming a better blamer is understanding the centrality of blame—as an act and influencer of relationships, not as an outgrowth of morality—in our lives.

One general determination to make is the role of “Reason.” As with most moral topics, the suggestion of the most influential Greeks was to have one’s Reason, as much as is possible, trump their emotions and desires. Certain views, namely those that Coates and Tognazzini call “cognitive accounts,” focusing on blame as a reasoned judgement as opposed to emotional response, would concur with this sentiment. Even those that believe that conative, attitudinal elements play a role in blame may hold that we’d be better blamers if we let the clinical, reasonable part of our mind decide when to employ those conative elements. Yet, as will become clearer, there are many interpretations of blame where such “reasoning” doesn’t exactly apply, such as those Neo-Strawsonians who posit that blame is a result of our attitudes, which always come first. Perhaps, in the most faithful invocation of Aristotle, the Strawsonian may say that Reason is king insofar as, in the long-term, we use it to train ourselves to have the right attitudes at the right times. Still, those like Wertheimer will balk, arguing that if reactive attitudes are primitive to blame and blame is primitive to morality, then there is no way in which it makes sense to reason about morality in order to determine when to feel a certain blame-relevant attitude. Just as Hume argued that Reason is the “slave of the passions,” a hardline neo-Strawsonian may argue that reasoning over when to blame is the slave of reactive attitudinal passions. Only when one parses out how relevant they feel cognitive and conative elements to be will they be able to know what they’re even trying to improve.

A second note is the value of turning inward. R. Jay Wallace writes that “blame carries with it a kind of practical commitment to critical self-scrutiny.”¹² Blame is based on being in a certain kind of moral community which in turn is based on equality. If we are to subject others in the community to critical scrutiny, equity dictates that we must turn that critical eye back upon ourselves. Whether or not one agrees with where Wallace goes with this claim, to be examined at the end of Part I, they may still agree that an agent improves themselves as a blamer by understanding their own role in the world of hypothetical judgments. In fact, it is this very sort of understanding that will allow not only improved blaming, but any blaming at all, in my interpretation presented in Part II. In any case, as an obligation or mere attempt at self-improvement,

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investigating when we ourselves would be blameworthy can help us gain a better sense of what we're doing when we're blaming others.

With these two questions out of the way, hopefully it is clear that discussing blame is worth doing. First, because blaming itself is worth doing, and second, because such a discussion can contribute to our becoming better blamers. Now that I've built up a bit of optimism in the value of philosophizing about blame, it's time to crush it by showing just how dismal a place we find ourselves in by philosophizing about it in accordance with general intuitions.

Notes

1. Coates and Tognazzini, *The Contours of Blame* (in *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, 3)
2. Malick, *The Tree of Life*
3. Sher, *In Praise of Blame*, 119
4. Ibid, 134
5. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 245
6. Franklin, *Valuing Blame* (in Coates and Tognazzini, *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, 210)
7. Ibid, 217
8. Wertheimer, *Constraining Condemning*, 494-495
9. Ibid, 496
10. Ibid
11. Ibid, 489
12. Wallace, *Hypocrisy, Moral Address, and the Equal Standing of Persons*, 326

Part I: Tearing Down the House

TOBIAS (*puzzled*): But that's not my... that's not all the choice I've got, is it?

AGNES: I don't care very much what choice you've got, my darling, but I *am* concerned with what choice you *make*.

— Edward Albee, *A Delicate Balance*

I.i | Mapping the Section

The premise of this section is that there is a central problem with many conceptions of blame—exposed by circumstantial moral luck—and that intuitive methods of solving this problem while retaining entrenched notions of moral responsibility expose a separate problem, one with how we go about generating these conceptions at all—that we view blame and responsibility in the metaphysical abstract as opposed to foremost a social phenomenon. It is from the requirement of blame as concrete and real-life applicable that the “luck” speed bump truly becomes a problem, and that generates the underlying thrust to my argument for a new interpretation of blame in Part II. I begin by establishing two key intuitions about blame, each of which I link with a landmark philosopher as a shorthand. First, there is the notion that one should only be blamed for what they have control over, as asserted by Kant. Second, that one should only be blamed for what can be traced to their underlying character, as asserted by Hume.

“Moral luck” was first formally introduced to philosophical discourse by Thomas Nagel in 1977. I describe moral luck, then hone in on one form—circumstantial moral luck, or the fact that receiving or avoiding blame for how one acts in a situation is dependent on being or not being faced with that situation in the first place, which is often a product of luck. In the Humean tradition, the best way to attack this problem is to develop extremely comprehensive and predictive models of potential blame recipients’ moral characters. I argue that for more reasons than one, this “solution” is utterly unrealistic, and is thus—when combined with my argument that blame is foremost a social phenomenon that should only be understood as involving real-life relationships—useless.

Finally, I expand my scope to include not only the blamed but blamers as well. That is to say, not only are there issues with conceptions of blame that relate to the status of the blamed—whether they were lucky or unlucky, how their typical practices apply to unusual circumstances—but there may also be issues regarding the status of the blamer. These are based on G.A. Cohen’s argument for “the standing to blame,” which—when combined with a desire to blame based on underlying character and the epistemic implausibility of knowing that character in the right way—seems to imply that very few people even *can* blame. We are left with glaring holes in standard accounts of blame wherein the doors are opened to things like rampant blamelessness, rampant blameworthiness, or the inability to actually blame the blameworthy.

I.ii | Only Blaming What is in Our Control

There are two requirements that have stood at the center of notions of *blame* for most all of the Western philosophical tradition. Not everyone has accepted both, or even one of them, but the intuitions they produce have at least colored standard discussion of blame and responsibility. First, one should have control over what they’re blamed for. We blame someone because they decided, of their own volition, to do a bad thing. The second requirement, that what one is blamed for should fundamentally show who they are as a person, I will touch on in a later subsection. For now, let’s focus on control. Though this idea goes back to at least Aristotle, in this section I will attribute it to Immanuel Kant, whose version is most directly influential to contemporary discourse. Here it is in his own words:

Even if it should happen that, by a particularly unfortunate fate or by the niggardly provision of a stepmotherly nature, [good] will should be wholly lacking in power to accomplish its purpose[...] it would sparkle like a jewel in its own right, as something that had its full worth in itself. (Kant)¹

We have control over our actions, and we use this control in accordance with our motivations and affinities, which in turn are driven by our good or bad will. If our motivations were to be out of the control of our will, or if our actions were to be in some way out of our control as actors, then blame appears

inappropriate. This idea, and its issues, are well laid out by Michael Zimmerman, who summarizes it by saying “moral responsibility is immune to luck inasmuch as one cannot be morally responsible for something that was not in one's control in some way and to some extent.”² There are two especially noteworthy parts to this statement: first, the use of the word “luck,” and second, the especially cautious phrasing “in some way and to some extent.”

I will start with “in some way and to some extent.” As others have, Zimmerman first dismisses standards of “total” control or autonomy. “If you doubt this,” he ventures, “consider the simple fact that whatever control you enjoy over anything depends on your having been born—something that we may hope was in someone's control, but not yours.”³ Thus, what we’re really looking at is a certain threshold of control. We want to be able to say that an agent had at least *this much* control over the blameworthy act or feature. Zimmerman goes on to establish a host of other distinctions regarding control, including having “comprehensive control” (to be able to act uncoerced), having “deliberate control” (to be able to create a state of affairs as a result of preceding knowledge, not merely accidentally), and having “regulative control”⁴ (to be able to both bring about *and* prevent a state of affairs). As we can already see, just what it means to predicate blame on the blamed being “in control” of what they do is unclear. Regarding the “luck” aspect, I will expand in the next two subsections.

I.iii | Defining Moral Luck

Moral luck is the notion, first formally introduced by Thomas Nagel, that while “we feel that the appropriateness of moral assessment is easily undermined by the discovery that the act or attribute, no matter how good or bad, is not under the person’s control,” the fact remains that “what we do depends in many more ways than [involuntary movement, physical force, or ignorance of circumstance] on what is not under our control—what is not produced by a good or a bad will, in Kant’s terms.”⁵ While it is easy to see that some things are not in one’s control in the relevant sense to blaming them, it is decidedly more difficult to discern certain other seemingly equally uncontrollable causes. And whether we do discern them or not, the reality is that we very rarely invoke them in removing an actor’s moral responsibility.

Part I

Nagel describes four forms of moral luck: constitutive luck (in “the kind of person you are”⁶), circumstantial luck (in “the kinds of problems and situations one faces”⁷), causal luck (in the ability to choose freely), and resultant luck (in how things turn out as a consequence of one’s action). In this thesis, I will focus on circumstantial luck. To expand, circumstantial moral luck is the idea that one’s moral standing, as dependent on the decisions they make, is determined in part by the choices they’re faced with in the first place, over which they have no control. We can now better understand the quote which opens this section, from Edward Albee’s play *A Delicate Balance*. In it, a series of odd events has forced Tobias into making a choice where either option will end terribly for him—one will cause him to lose his relationship with his best friend and the other will cause him to lose his relationship with his daughter (if he hasn’t already lost both of them by this point in the story). His cynical wife Agnes has little sympathy for his dilemma. To her, he will have to be responsible for whatever choice he makes, no matter if he seems to have been cornered into making a bad one. This can be considered an acceptance of circumstantial moral luck; blameworthiness pays no mind to the variability of situations presented to its objects.

Nagel’s example here is that of the citizens of Germany during the 1930s who decided to join, or at least not resist, the Nazi party. Insofar as they faced a moral choice, or test, for which they could be held as blameworthy, “most of them are culpable for having failed this test,” Nagel concedes. Yet he continues, “but it is a test to which the citizens of other countries were not subjected, with the result that even if they, or some of them, would have behaved as badly as the Germans in like circumstances, they simply did not and therefore are not similarly culpable.”⁸ He, unlike Agnes, is sympathetic to the problems of circumstantial luck. There is no claim here that what a citizen-turned-Nazi did was not bad, or that what some “lucky,” unwitting, say, Canadian did (namely not becoming a Nazi) *was*. Instead, it takes the uncontroversial position that, as a standard, one should not be held morally responsible for when they were born or where they live,[†] combined with the fact that being of a certain age and in a certain place when the Nazi party came into power is a

[†] Although the latter can be under the agent’s control and thus potentially blameworthy (of course, if they had moved to Germany *because* they wanted to join the Nazi party they believed would soon rise, it would be a different case)

necessary condition of having joined them, to show that there is something suspect about connecting the undoubted badness of the act with the responsibility and blameworthiness of the actor.

It is important here to note the Kantian and Humean intuitions—that what an agent is morally responsible for should in some way be in their control, and is intimately tied to their moral character—are a general precondition for any kind of moral luck being much of a problem at all. If one is a hardline consequentialist, or follows another moral framework which focuses little on the intention and agency of the actor, the presence of moral luck is more a fun fact than an existential threat. At this juncture, such a position may seem distasteful but ultimately allowable, and there is no reason to fundamentally alter their practices of blame. By the end of this section, I hope to show that it is more than merely distasteful, due to the extent to which being unable to deny circumstantial luck—simply saying, “too bad for the unlucky, and more power to the lucky”—guts numerous moral intuitions, like that us and the individuals around us would perform more admirably than perceived villains, both historical and contemporary. It is one thing to off-handedly say “well, who knows what I would have done?” and another to truly accept the inability to assert differences in blameworthiness among someone who appears obviously “bad” and another who appears obviously “good.”

If simply accepting circumstantial luck still looks like a live option after reading this section, then I fear we may be operating on fundamentally irreconcilable moral grounds. As I continue to hammer home, moral responsibility, and blameworthiness in particular, is more a natural byproduct of human interpersonal relationships than it is a metaphysical state. To accept circumstantial luck is, in my opinion, to remove the part of moral responsibility that allows for rewarding relationships and, it follows, a good and fulfilling life. Even while I end up making certain concessions to luck, I hold that we simply *must* see at least some actions of others as in a strong way being informed by them as relatable and responsible agents if we are to have an adequate moral framework. A large part of seeing others as relatable and responsible agents is linking our experiences with theirs.

Part I

Circumstantial moral luck poses quite a problem for a standard of blameworthiness which runs through the blamed's control. It is the impetus for the earlier referenced claim that "all control (all the control that anyone ever has) is partial control." Every single one of the versions of control laid out by Zimmerman functions on the precondition that one is in a certain circumstance. Whether one can perform an act intentionally based on previous knowledge or merely accidentally, whether one can both generate and prevent a state of affairs or only generate—these sorts of things are irrelevant unless one is in the right choice-making situation. Take his illustration for "deliberate control": opening a safe because you know the code versus because you've turned the dial at random, serendipitously entering the correct numbers. You have *neither* deliberate control *nor* its alternative, "coincidental control," if you don't find yourself sitting in front of the safe in the first place. Of course, you might be away from the safe because you simply chose not to go, which is under your control, but circumstantial moral luck hits deeper. What if you are away from the safe because you were born three hundred years ago, before the first patent for the modern safe was ever even filed? There is no kind of control that accounts for you being born then as compared to now; such a thing is exclusively a result of luck. In short, all forms of control which may be invoked as conditions for blameworthiness are themselves predicated on something which is outside of the agent's control.

Now, the notion of someone having the intention to burgle a safe that doesn't exist sounds far-fetched, so why should we care if we're unable to blame them? Well, because there are many more relevant cases. One is the aforementioned examples of the Nazi and the would-be Nazi. The possibility that one's next-door neighbor or family member is less blameworthy than a Nazi only because they were luckier is seriously troubling. Another example is seen when Zimmerman imagines an assassination that is not committed because the would-be assassin, Georg, sneezes at the moment he's to take the shot at his target, Henrik, and loses his chance. If we really think about it, it is not difficult to come up with instances where blame is avoided solely because the would-be wrongdoer was not given the opportunity to perform the blameworthy act. Even being at a certain location a few seconds earlier or later may be the difference between one gaining or losing the ability, or control, to perform a given act. We tend to be blamed for what we've *done*,

which involves not only us doing it of our own volition, but also us having the opportunity to do it, which cannot be of our own volition.

An alternative, I again concede, is to simply accept this. Accept an especially reduced “control” requirement wherein to be blameworthy for an act, one must have control over their performance of that act only insofar as the universe complies to allow them that control. In other words, maintain some form of the “control” requirement, but hold that only certain people are eligible for that control—those who happen to be in the right circumstance. Everyone who doesn’t get the chance to perform a blameworthy or praiseworthy act simply isn’t in the blame-praise paradigm, like how you can’t shoot a three-pointer when playing baseball. On its face this is a fairly suspect spinoff of Kant, for it purports to require control, yet operates under the assumption that those eligible for such control are eligible due to factors outside of their control. Yet still, this may not seem unattractive in practice.

To that, I respond that the more cases one looks at, the more unattractive it looks. Many will be okay with not blaming the Canadian would-be Nazi, even if the theory behind it is suspect. But what about Zimmerman’s example of an assassination that is not committed because they would-be assassin, Georg, sneezes at the moment he’s to take the shot at Henrik, and loses his chance to assassinate? On the scale of blame to praise, are we willing to place Georg closer to the innocent passerby on the street than to the version of him that succeeded in the assassination?

If we are serious about disqualifying those who aren’t in the right circumstance from being blamed, we end up stuck between a rock and a hard place. Either we can focus on blaming people for what they succeed in doing or we can shift the main object of blame to what they *intend* to do. The first cannot be applied to Georg, for he’s disqualified from being blamed for anything related to the actual assassination, something he could not do due to his sneeze. The second is problematic for reasons addressed in my criticism of *type-of-person* arguments below, which in large part hinges on the question: if we’re blaming Georg because his intention is rotten, who can smell it? In this case, us, because we were told his intentions explicitly. In the real world, intentions are hardly ever so clear. Envision it was not a single sneeze that prevented the assassination but rather a chronic one—that is, a cold which kept Georg in bed all week, unable

to carry out his plan. The difference between the single sneeze and the cold seems blame-irrelevant, but it's suddenly become a lot less acceptable for us to swoop in and blame the sickly Georg barring a superhuman understanding of what his intentions *might have been* had he been healthier. As Melville put it, "the *might-have-been* is but a boggy ground to build on."¹⁰ We end up claiming, as Zimmerman puts it, that "Georg is responsible; he is just not responsible *for* anything,"¹¹ which is a tough position to sell.

Still, this all ignores the greatest threat that luck poses for a "control" requirement to blame. This comes from the idea of "constitutive" moral luck. As Nagel writes, "how can one be responsible even for the stripped-down acts of the will itself, if *they* are the product of antecedent circumstances outside of the will's control?"¹² No matter one's theory of psychological and moral development, it is impossible that one's moral will is *exclusively* the product of their moral will. Nature, nurture, whatever it may be—many things beyond the will and intention of an agent come to shape their succeeding will and intentions, and thus actions.

One cannot pull the same move with constitutive luck that could be made with circumstantial luck, only making those eligible for blame who the universe conspired with to give the opportunity for the blameworthy act. That is because, when both circumstantial and constitutive luck are taken into account, the list of people who had the opportunity to do the blameworthy act would look suspiciously similar to the people who actually *did* do the blameworthy act. Of course all the eligible people have done the blameworthy act, for they did the act in virtue of having the very moral will, or constitution, that made them eligible. Put another way, the subset of people who *can* be blamed for a given act is indistinguishable from the subset of people who *did* that act, for both their doing the act and their eligibility to be blamed follow from them having the right moral will and being at the right place at the right time.

At this point we've violated the agent's "regulative control." We can only blame those who have control over their ability to do the act, but none, or almost none (depending on how staunchly determinist one is), of those people have the ability to *not* do the act. In a sense, they have neither side of "regulative control," for both their ability to bring about a resulting state of affairs and their inability to prevent it are not within their control. We can see now what Melville was saying with his talk of boggy ground. Combining

Kant and Nagel mixes the firm certainty of control with the fluid unpredictability of luck, and we end up stuck in the mud.

I.v | Only Blaming What Proceeds from Our Character

As mentioned, the second key standard of blame is that the object of blame somehow relates back to who the blamed is as a person. That is to say, there is some element of that choice which derives from and reflects the true moral character of that actor, and that this element is sufficient to allow us to blame. We don't blame someone for doing a bad thing or contributing to a bad state of affairs, necessarily, we blame them because they are a bad person in some way, which was manifested by the fact that they did a bad thing or contributed to a bad state of affairs. This idea I will attribute to David Hume, who wrote is as such:

[...] where [actions] proceed not from some *cause* in the character and disposition of the person who performed them, they can neither redound to his honour, if good; nor infamy, if evil.[...] For as actions are objects of our moral sentiment, so far only as they are indications of the internal character, passions, and affections; it is impossible that they can give rise either to praise or blame, where they proceed not from these principles, but are derived altogether from external violence.
(Hume)¹³

For instance, I steal your wallet. There are a number of external factors that might affect this action; I may be especially poor, you may be especially careless, I may have been dared by a friend. But somewhere within this action, there is an element of my moral character, or will, that has led me to commit it, and thus we cite that element to blame me. Somewhere deep down I am a thief, which led me to thief, and I am morally inferior to a version of myself that isn't and didn't. If the relevant external factors not only contribute to but actually cause the action to occur—say if I tripped and accidentally snatched your precariously placed wallet with my flailing arms, grabbing for a stable surface—there would be no akin element of my moral

character present, and thus I would not be blameworthy; no better nor worse than a version of myself that had not tripped, if perhaps clumsier.

It should be fairly easy to see the problems that luck poses for this. Hume can skirt around constitutive moral luck by claiming that it doesn't matter whether one's moral character is under their control, only that what they're being blamed for stems from that moral character, however lucky or unlucky it may be. However, when we take into account circumstantial moral luck, we run into the troubling realization that, even in cases where a blameworthy act directly follows from an actor's moral character, such moral character is only one of two ingredients at play—the actor must also be in the right circumstance to allow that moral character to manifest. If the basis for Hume's argument is a fear of undue influence from “external violence” in our blame practices, it's clear that, like the Kantian, one can't simply limit those who are eligible for blame to those who have the opportunity to exhibit their moral character. Is a situation in which one who has a vile moral character avoids blame simply because they weren't given the chance to show it not a prime example of interfering “external violence”?

I.vi | Counterfactuals and the Epistemic Argument

A natural response to this might be to dig deeper into the Humean position. That is, let go completely of blaming for actions that proceed from moral character, and start blaming for moral character itself. Thus, our lucky Canadian, who would have joined the Nazi party had he been at a place and time to do so, is equally responsible as the unlucky German who did just that. Now we have moved to tricky territory, for it is the territory of counterfactuals, the boggy ground of might-have-been. We no longer seem to be holding actors responsible for what they've done at all. Instead, we're holding them responsible for what they *would have* done, similarly to the Kantian notion that unactualized evil is still blameworthy. Both the Canadian and the German are being blamed because they *would have* become a Nazi, had they been in the right place at the right time, with the fact that the German actually did so just being evidence of that claim. The important distinction between the two is of evidence, no longer of action. It can now be seen how we've steered away from an explicit focus on control. It no longer matters if the people we're blaming have or don't have control

over what they've done, for they haven't necessarily *done* anything; they merely *are* some way, whether by choice or not.

When we reach this point, where evidence is our focus, we have hit what Andrew Latus calls “the epistemic argument” against the supposed terror of moral luck. Rather than affecting the moral evaluation of an actor, luck merely affects our epistemic access into an actor, epistemic access which would allow us to make a better-informed moral judgement. In terms of circumstantial luck, he refers to a variation on one of Nagel's examples, involving three men, where two of them decide to drive drunk, one of whom strikes a child that happens to run into the street (a case of resultant bad moral luck), and the third manages to avoid the situation which facilitated drunk driving, but *would have* acted the same as the first two had he been exposed to their circumstances. He is the beneficiary of good circumstantial moral luck. To Latus, “it is not the case that circumstantial luck causes the potential drunk driver to be any less blameworthy than the first two. Rather, circumstantial luck may hide how blameworthy the potential drunk driver really is.”¹⁴ And when wondering what the source of blame might be which leads to all three folks receiving an equal share of it, Latus gets Humean: “what makes them blameworthy is the kind of people they are, i.e., they are morally equivalent because their characters are equivalent in this respect.”¹⁵ Where Hume speaks of our evaluation of actions being predicated on those actions' relation to the actor's character, Latus speaks of our evaluation of actions or *potential* actions as being predicated on their relation to the actors' character.

What exactly “character” suggests is foggy, but a reasonable continuation of this position is to state that we blame individuals because they are a certain *type of person*. The *type of person* that would do something wrong. Again, their actually doing that wrong, if they do, is no more than proof that they are that type of person. To circle back to our German and Canadian, we can imagine telling our thought-to-be morally lucky Canadian that, after seeing him miss his child's soccer game without argument when his boss told him to work late, then refusing to hold the elevator door open for a work subordinate, he is in fact as morally culpable as his German counterpart. This is not because his actions are as bad as those of the German, but because they show that his character—of placing the directives of his superiors above personal principles and an unfeelingness for those perceived as inferior—is such that they would be if he were given the opportunity.

It is the character of the *type of person* that would become a Nazi. Through careful detective work, the epistemic gap that Latus suggests seems to be closed.

I.vii | Criticizing Type-of-Person Proposals — Sher's Response

I find this position, labeled by George Sher as “BC”¹⁶ (as in Blame Character), problematic for several reasons. The first is a criticism developed by Sher himself, who shows that—when we really try to hammer out what moral character means—such a trait-based, type-of-person view results in either wrongdoers getting off scot-free or some sort of blame explosion. He defines three versions of the view. In BC1, we blame someone because their act has manifested a certain vice. In BC2, we blame someone because their act shows that they have a disposition to do bad acts like it in a range of situations, while not necessarily showing that they have a relevant vice. In BC3, we blame someone because only because their act shows that they *have it in them* do that bad act. Sher classifies the three versions as blaming because an act “(a) manifests a vice; (b) manifests a bad tendency; and (c) shows that he ‘has it in him’ to perform a bad act of the relevant sort.”¹⁷ Each comes with their own faults.

BC1 seems to wholesale excuse those who act “out of character.” It is the most liberal interpretation of Hume, where unless an act reveals something constitutively essential in the actor, it means little. Unless my unprompted punching of you can be traced back to some universal disregard for the wellness of others, or something similarly broad and pervasive, it escapes blame. Besides, this is no need to go this far to satisfy Hume, as the impetus for his proposal came from the issue of transience, that acts are already done by the time we get on to blaming, and therefore the blaming must be for something else, something still present. BC2 and BC3 both refer to something that would still be present at the time of blaming—a certain disposition and a certain ability, respectively—and thus would both quell Hume’s fears without the unsavory consequences of BC1.

BC2 is less extreme than BC1, but still places rather stringent standards on blame. Perhaps my punching of you no longer needs to represent my disdain for the wellness of others, but instead now must represent my tendency to slug innocent bystanders, in order to be blamed. Unfortunately for you, you’re the

first innocent bystander I've ever slugged, and I'll likely never do it again. It's not that some fever came over me, leading to my acting in a state of animal wildness. No, I knew full well what I was doing, and did it with the intention to hurt you and violate whatever relevant rights you might have, but I simply don't have the tendency to do it. Perhaps I consider punching people from time to time, and it's not wholly unbelievable that it'll occur at some later point, but more likely than not it won't. Thus, you've no claim to blame me. This, of course, doesn't only occur in such outlandish situations. Take a murderer. This murderer is not a serial killer, and doesn't have the tendency to murder people, but simply had some fixation on your child which led to murdering them. This is not someone we want to be letting off the hook.

BC3 is the one that seems to result in a blame explosion. As Sher argues, "I suspect that for (just about) every person and (just about) every type of bad act, there is some conceivable set of conditions under which that person would perform an act of that type."¹⁸ Put another way, we all 'have it in us' to perform a given bad act, if we adjust the circumstances to be conducive enough. In the words of Adam Smith, "We are capable, it may be said, of resolving, and even taking measures to execute, many things which, when it comes to the point, we feel ourselves altogether incapable of executing."¹⁹ For these purposes, it is sufficient to accept that, if it is not the case that everyone is capable of every act, there are at least enough people who would 'have it in them' to commit enough bad acts, if the circumstances were dire enough, to make BC3 too blame-happy.

I.viii | Criticizing Type-of-Person Proposals — Untraceability of Decisions

My second criticism is that we often make morally-charged decisions in ways that are not particularly reflective of our moral character, and as such, don't suggest as much about our *type* as Hume or Latus would demand. What I'm saying here is a variation on the J.S. Mill claim that "ninety-nine hundredths of all our actions are done from other motives [than ethical duty]"²⁰ The variation comes from the fact that one might assume that the one out of every hundred actions that *are* derived from an ethical duty are those that are performed in especially morally-charged situations—when the stakes are high and the moral implications

seem obvious. I posit, instead, that even in morally-charged situations, there's little guarantee that an agent's choice will be satisfactorily derived from their moral character.

To clarify, there are two proposals which I am specifically not endorsing. The first is one based on the idea of the "fundamental attribution error." This is the error of attributing a given act to internal characteristics of the actor, ignoring the outsized effects of circumstance. Gilbert Harman describes the intuitive, yet to him wrong, view, as that "we ordinarily suppose that a person's character traits help to explain at least some things that the person does. The honest person tries to return the wallet *because* he or she is honest. The person who pockets the contents of the wallet and throws the rest of the wallet away does so *because* he or she is dishonest."²¹ To Harman, this doesn't merely give too much weight to one cause and not enough to another, but actually gives credence to something which does not exist at all. We may have certain psychological dispositions (including, ironically, to fall for the fundamental attribution error), and it is a situation combined with these dispositions which produces an action, but that is not the same thing as a source moral character, something he dismisses as "folk morality."²²

This may appear not out of step with what I've already suggested. Harman, in fact, explicitly describes how his "situationist" perspective could explain issues of moral luck. How, once we stop pretending actions are attributable to some mythological moral character, we will be satisfied with not treating differentially lucky actors differently, for we know that the key determiners of their choice were external to them. However, I am not at all seeking to claim that moral character, whatever exactly it may mean, is a myth. With a more nuanced reading, I find, in fact, that even the very psychological experiments that situationists tend to invoke fail to support their view as well as they believe. Without wading into that debate at this juncture, it is sufficient for me to make clear that the criticism here presented by me against the Humean view stems not from a lack of belief in the source he claims—moral character or will—but rather from a skepticism over when it actually *is* the source. In other words, less a *fundamental* attribution error—attributing acts to what's not there—and more an *over*-attribution error—too often attributing acts to what may not be their true basis. I simply see no strong reason to believe that just because we have a moral character that all decisions in morally-charged situations directly point to that character. Unlike blame, which I will argue

cannot be interpreted without our eyes squarely on real human interactions, I believe morality and moral character *can* be, to an extent. Moral character, insofar as it can be detached from moral responsibility, is not necessarily the sum of acts in morally-charged situations.

The other position I am not endorsing is that of a completely random relationship between the moral weight of the decision being made and how deeply that decision reflects an actor's moral character. That is to say, it may appear that a line like "even in morally-charged decisions, there's little guarantee that an agent's choice will be derived from their moral character" combined with an unwillingness to do away with moral character altogether would lead to a paradigm where decisions that *can* be traced back to moral character occur with equal frequency in morally-charged and totally trivial occasions. As if the one out of every hundred decisions Mill makes which is done from an ethical duty is picked out of a hat. Perhaps my decision to defraud my elderly grandmother out of her savings was a morally superficial decision, not reflective of who I truly am, but my choice of cream cheese over jam on my bagel this morning—now that came from a place deep within my moral being.

I want to leave that option open, it's true. I believe that the situation does not determine the moral depth of the choice made, and thus an apparently banal situation *could* lead to a morally-attributable decision and an apparently morally-charged situation *could* not. Yet, these are claims against deterministic certainty, not likelihood. As a standard, it is safe to say that more morally-charged situations tend to lead to more morally-assessable decisions, and vice-versa. The issue lies in the fact that, when it comes to resolving circumstantial moral luck, the cross-situational translations being proposed are rather complex, and in order to make such translations a basis for a moral framework, something close to deterministic certainty is needed. As in, *type-of person* solutions to circumstantial moral luck believe that decisions in daily life can be traced back to something specific about the agent's moral character. Thus, they are translated from daily-life decisions to character attributes, then translated again into a decision in an unlike scenario. If there's uncertainty over what exactly that initial, daily-life decision says about the agent's character, or if nothing about that character *necessarily* dictates what choice will be made in the unlike scenario, the process starts to fall apart. I described earlier that we closed Latus's epistemic gap through "careful detective work." What I'm proposing here is that

what we actually did was something closer to gathering evidence through an eyewitness who saw the suspect enter the house and leave five minutes later, then filled in the blanks themselves. While not baseless, the conclusions reached will involve assumptions.

I.ix | Illustrating the Untraceability Criticism

How this sort of thing could happen, making a morally-charged decision without necessarily drawing upon the moral character you've exhibited in daily life, we see in two narratives. The first is Tim O'Brien's novel *The Things They Carried*, specifically the chapter "On the Rainy River." In it, the main character (a semi-autobiographical picture of O'Brien himself) is, as he puts it, "drafted to fight a war I hated. I was twenty-one years old. Young, yes, and politically naive, but even so the American war in Vietnam seemed to me wrong."²³ Though admittedly not a radical, he participates in some anti-war activism. His position is tempered by a fear of ridicule by the members of his town, but even this fear runs counter to his explicit values, as he describes his detestation of their "blind, thoughtless, automatic acquiescence to it all, their simple-minded patriotism, their prideful ignorance."²⁴ In short, he is to participate in something he holds as unjust and wrong, supported by a group of people he considers foolish, with factors of adolescence and small-town relationships complicating matters.

O'Brien finds himself tortured by the temptation of fleeing to Canada, but not due to any ethical dilemma. That matter is settled: the war is bad and he would be good to dodge it. Instead, he is tortured by fear. "I feared the war, yes, but I also feared exile,"²⁵ he writes. His thought is dominated not by how the decision relates to his espoused (and thus far lived) ethical values, but rather by how the decision will affect his reputation, relationships, and emotional wellbeing.[‡] Eventually one fear overtakes the other, and he flees to northern Washington.

When he is rowed out to the border, though, he finds himself unable to swim across. "I would not be brave," he says, "that old image of myself as a hero, as a man of conscience and courage, all that was just a

[‡] If you feel that things like these *are* in fact part of one's ethical values, see "An Objection to The Untraceability Criticism" below.

threadbare pipe dream.[...] *It had nothing to do with morality.* Embarrassment, that's all it was. And right then I submitted. I would go to the war—I would kill and maybe die—because I was embarrassed not to.” [italics mine]²⁶ It is a profoundly morally-charged decision, among the *most* morally-charged decisions, to risk one's life for a cause and to agree to kill unjustly, and yet here it is made foremost on the basis of a fear of humiliation, something that is completely unrelated to the aforementioned ethical matters. It could be said that he's betrayed his moral character, at least the one we would be able to generate from his daily life, due to some amoral influence.

The second narrative is that in the Kendrick Lamar song “XXX.” In the opening verse, Lamar describes the type of ‘tests’ and prodding he felt growing up impoverished, black, and unprotected, evoking imagery of fighting off sharks for food. The second verse hits suddenly, as a sort of litany recounting a man who, thinking of Lamar's reputation for patient wisdom and Christian forgiveness, asks him how to react to those who have killed the man's son. Lamar subverts this reputation and, in deep detail, describes how he would go about a murderous retribution were he faced with the man's circumstance. Decidedly and directly impiously, he mentions how he'd be stalking his victim “leaving [church] service if that's all I got.”²⁷ He seems to be portraying a moral inverse to who he'd previously shown himself to be. But then, upon the verse's end, another subversion occurs, when his rant is cut short by arriving at an event, where he starts, “alright, kids, we're gonna talk about gun control...”²⁸ What are we to make of all this?

Lamar seemed to be the *type of person* that would respond measuredly and fairly were a tragedy to befall him. That's the reason the mourner approached him in the first place. Moreover, it's why he finds himself guiding children on the benefits of gun control, and presumably other alternatives to violence. Yet, like O'Brien, on a matter directly relating to the potential killing of another person, Lamar betrays his type. Where O'Brien stated that his motivation was embarrassment, Lamar is equally forthright with his own, asking the mourner, “Tell me what you do for love, loyalty, and passion of/ All the memories collected, moments you could never touch?”²⁹ The answer, to him, is anything—moral or immoral. The implication is that this overriding violence and loyalty is deep within him, partly conditioned by his rough environment. If

the mourner were to ask how such a purportedly moral man could do such horrible things, Lamar might easily respond as O'Brien did: *it has nothing to do with morality*.

In sum, these narratives describe people who, previous to a certain morally-charged decision, and for Lamar in an especially public and head-on fashion, showed themselves to have a specific moral character, yet when push came to shove, that moral character was irrelevant, or at least overpowered. They did the thing they were not supposed to do, not just ethically but logically, if we assumed a direct connection between moral character and morally-charged decision. Is this only a repetition of Sher's response to BC3, that everyone 'has it in them' to do anything if the situation is conducive enough? I don't believe so, for that criticism referred to actors' ability to do certain typically bad acts. It could be assumed that the reason they 'have it in them' to do that typically bad act, is because in certain situations *it's not bad*, or is justified. These examples, on the other hand, show how individuals who have not shown themselves to have poor moral character will do things that they believe are bad, in situations which directly test their badness, due to amoral reasons. They are illustrations of how the decision someone makes in a given situation is not necessarily *traceable* to how they act outside of that situation, even if it would seem that both sides should tap into the same underlying morality. This is a significant roadblock in attempting to translate decisions across circumstances via character. Specifically, in terms of *type-of-person* proposals of blame for counterfactuals, the result appears to be that we can't blame agents because they *would have* done a bad act, for we don't know if they *would have* done that act unless they actually do it, no matter how slick our detective work.

I.x | An Objection to the Untraceability Criticism

One major objection to this conclusion could be framed in two ways, but both boil down to the argument that I've overly constrained the idea of *type of person*. Either you might say that the factors which influence O'Brien and Lamar are not at all amoral, or that they are amoral, but that the relevant understanding of *type of person* involves more than that which is purely moral. My mistake, then, is that I've shown how *certain* parts of one's character may not be traceable from individual decisions, but ignored how the things which these decisions *can* be traced to are themselves aspects of their character. As mentioned,

both O'Brien and Lamar are highly specific about what, if not morality, led to them making the choice they did. So why is it that, say, O'Brien's overpowering fear of embarrassment isn't included in his *type of person*? After all, we're talking about justifying blame, and it seems that we should be able to blame some *type of person* for flaws that are not explicitly moral. Thus, we can blame someone because they *would have* done some evil, so long as we accept that why they would have done it need not be an appeal to a moral duty.

I concede that this nuanced understanding of *type of person* could yield superior assessment of counterfactuals. Knowing alternative aspects of a person, beyond their explicit moral values, can help us in determining what they *would have* done, no doubt. It is important to recognize, though, that even these alternative aspects of character do not always manifest the same way across situations. The type of potential embarrassment or moral violation or whatever other stimulus to moral character that one might feel when making an unprecedented decision can be, well, unprecedented, and so too can be the way in which that character reacts. Looking at the objection, it is merely an expansion of what may be translated from one situation to another, but still provides no solution to my skepticism of these translations being deterministically certain, and thus useful in a framework of blame. When gathering evidence to determine how an actor will react to a unique choice, more circumstantial evidence is better than less, but is still no smoking gun.

Furthermore, even if you find the untraceability criticism implausible, if you believe that with a robust enough definition of *type of person* and sufficient enough detective work we can find the shared moral origin of all of an agent's decisions, there is an impracticality you must overcome. In fact, the increased robustness of the definition makes it all the more impractical to actually put to use. When *type of person* meant only specific, explicit moral values, the potential cross-circumstance translations were straightforward. The bank of character traits which any two unlike decisions could draw from was limited. So if we saw a trait appear somewhere, it was relatively easy to see how it would manifest somewhere else. Once this bank is expanded, and a given decision may be traced back to things like fear of embarrassment and environmentally-facilitated trauma alongside explicit moral values, actually making the translation feels impossible.

Part I

In any one situation there are now a multitude of aspects of our character influencing our decision; how are we to know which ones we can directly translate to an unlike decision? How do we know which will win out when they come into a very specific kind of conflict? Now we take into account O'Brien's fear of embarrassment (and presumably a million other factors) alongside his anti-war sentiment when trying to predict if he'll flee to Canada. Too many factors now at play for such a prediction to be realistically reliable. Put another way, even if *every* act an agent does is traceable to their *type-of-person*, the cases above show just how large Latus's epistemic gap really is. It's not merely that one actor did an act and another likely would have but we cannot be certain. It's instead that the variety of components of moral character that potentially interact when making a decision means that we can rarely say "likely would have" with too much confidence, unless we get some especially obvious clues, for at least some of those components will inevitably be stimulated differently in a novel circumstance than they have before. In general, the issues we run into for a given the *type-of-person* proposal result not from how exactly we define "type of person," but from the reliance on counterfactual knowledge that swings on a pendulum from impossible to impractical.

There is an analogy here with criticisms that have been made of the requirement of total autonomy for moral responsibility. This requirement, in a sense, seeks to offset not only coercive forces but also constitutive moral luck, for it demands that an agent be free of *any* external factors which may determine its choice, including environmental factors which shape its moral tendencies. Not only, as I've mentioned, is this an impossible standard to attain, it is also undesirable. As Susan Wolf points out, this sort of autonomy requires nothing less than chaos, as even with something as seemingly innocuous as Reason, "the ability to act in accordance with Reason might be said to free one from having to act in accordance with mere Desire, but, to be autonomous, one must also be free from having to act in accordance with (mere?) Reason."³⁰ What we end up with, trying to resolve constitutive luck in this way, is assessing versions of agents who simply *have no constitution*, which is absurd. This is paralleled by the ultimate end of strong *type-of-person* arguments with robust conceptions of *type* which seem to be seeking a resolution to circumstantial luck by assessing agents who *have no circumstances*. Even if the earlier illustrations failed to convince you, if we follow the increasingly widely accepted view that circumstances are not merely the setting for, but can, at least in part, play a role in

determining moral choices, it should seem obvious that the goal of circumstance-less moral judgement isn't a worthy one.

To recap: the central dissonance presented by circumstantial moral luck is that, while we seem to want to blame only for things that agents can control, or at least reflect something deep within them, we often differentially blame as a result of differential circumstances. One agent is able to hide their blameworthy character because they never faced a circumstance that would publicize it. *Type-of-person* solutions suggest we blame for counterfactuals, whether agents *would have* been blameworthy or blameless had they been faced with a given moral test, and Latus's epistemic argument claims that the aforementioned differential blame results only from our differential confidence or epistemic insight between a probable counterfact and an actual fact, between someone who likely *would have* done bad and someone who *did*. Thus, it is our prerogative to close the epistemic gap by comprehensively understanding an agent's moral character, so that we can apply it accurately to hypotheticals.

Sher responds that *type-of-person* solutions are entirely implausible for they always blame too much or too little. The *untraceability* argument I present holds that what *type of person* someone appears to be cannot show with any certainty how they will react to unprecedented moral tests, as too many amoral influences creep into any given choice. And if the conception of *type* is expanded to include these other influences, it becomes overly difficult to perform the translation from how *type* manifests in one circumstance to how it might manifest in another. By trying to make our understanding of moral character more comprehensive, we've made it unwieldy and untranslatable, and thus grown, not shrunken, the epistemic gap. As such, we're left back at square one: unsure of how to blame the potential wrongdoer who's saved by circumstantial luck; morally assessing those who *would do* wrong as better than those who *did do* wrong and equal to those who *would do* right.

I.xi | A Second Objection to the Untraceability Criticism

There are likely quite a few who by now feel I've strayed far off the right path. The *untraceability criticism* against *type-of-person arguments* accused them of impossibility of execution. We don't always make

morally-charged decisions by invoking our moral character, at least in a way that would allow us to translate one's actions in one situation to actions in a hypothetical other situation as successfully as *type-of-person* arguments require. So what if *we* can't do it? There still exists a (counter)fact of the matter—that the person in question would or would not do a certain action if in a certain hypothetical situation. This is what the epistemic argument was really all about, right? That our issue was not of luck terrorizing traditional notions of blame and responsibility, but rather that we lacked the epistemic access to execute those traditional notions. Just because we lack the skills necessary to blame who should be blamed, that doesn't mean that they're not blameworthy, just perhaps that we should accept that our human limitations will necessarily create a chasm between the blameworthy and the known-to-be blameworthy. This is similar to the true Kantian answer to the "who can smell it?" question posed earlier—*God* can still smell it. One need not invoke God to follow the epistemic argument to a place where one is saying something like "it's still a *fact* that this person is blameworthy, even if there's no way that anyone will ever know."

This response strikes right at the heart for the purpose of this thesis. The notion of a blameworthiness being a fact that potentially no real human can know is a failed interpretation of blame as a whole. As is said by Strawson about those who believe the truth or falsity of determinism is central to blame, this mode of thinking "could seem real only to one who had utterly failed to grasp the purport of" what blame truly is. Interpersonal attitudes such as blame are "part of the general framework of human life, not something that can come up for review as particular cases can come up for review within this general framework."³¹ In other words, *type-of-person* arguments end up being another way "to over-intellectualize the facts,"³² or attempt to force the rounded nature of human interaction into a square, logically-sound box.

The notion of blameworthiness as an abstract fact, solely having to do with the metaphysics of the case, only contingently attached to either being known or invoked as blame, is mistaken. As is perhaps the single greatest point made by Strawson, blame is for and of human relationships and attitudes. It only exists in the realm of interpersonal interactions, it does not get decided elsewhere *then* applied to such interactions. I previously stated that removing all constitutive and circumstantial luck from moral judgements is akin to assessing someone who has *no* constitution and is in *no* circumstance, respectively. The abstracted notion of

blameworthiness is similar. It removes itself so thoroughly from its own foundation that it becomes nonsense. If someone cannot be blamed by a real human—say, because the epistemic access necessary to determine their desert is superhuman—then they cannot be blameworthy. If I were the last human left on Earth and did something that you would vehemently condemn if only you’d been there and seen it, that does not mean that I’m blameworthy for it. In such a situation, there is no such thing as blame or blameworthiness. Successes and failures—yes; moral rights and wrongs—perhaps. But blame and praise—no.

Thus, criticizing the impossibility of us executing *type-of-person* proposals is not beside the point at all; it very much *is* the point. It is because we cannot realistically execute this method of blame that it is useless as a method, and because it is useless it cannot be the correct interpretation of blame.

I.xii | The Standing to Blame

So far I have assessed how a potentially *blamed* party’s status might affect whether they’re blamed or not, but have yet to touch on the effect that the potentially *blaming* party’s status might have. It has been assumed that blameworthiness is something like a metaphysical state—determined only by the blamed agent’s relationship to right and wrong, and doled out by morality itself. But in the real world, blame is doled out by other moral agents, who themselves can be good, bad, or the subject of blame. Many have posited that, in order for a blaming to be justified, the blaming party must have a certain privilege: the standing to blame.

This standing is not trivial. To G.A. Cohen, claiming that a blamer doesn’t have it is one of three options a blamed party has when disarming a condemnation, on equal footing with claiming that the blamed didn’t actually do what they were accused of and that what they did was not actually wrong. To reiterate, it’s not merely that blame from one without standing lacks some of the power it might otherwise have, it’s that it would be as groundless as accusing someone of something they simply didn’t do. Cohen makes clear that the domain of standing to blame is detached from the accuracy of the accusation. “When I say that a critic may be disabled from condemning,” he writes, “[...] I do not mean that the critic cannot be speaking the truth when she condemns the agent: it is central to the interest of the phenomenon under exploration here that she might well be speaking the truth.”³³ Further, Cohen never goes so far as the biblical “judge not lest ye be

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judged,” which seems to imply that the blamer must be free of any and all sins to assess another. He is only pointing out that there are *some* times when a blaming is unjustified *only* because of the status of the blamer.

What is standing, then, and how do we lose it? Macalester Bell lays out the four things typically considered essential to having standing as “Y’s wrongdoing is X’s business,” “X and Y are contemporaries and inhabit the same moral community,” “X has not engaged in similar wrongdoing in the past,” and “X is not responsible for or complicit in Y’s wrongdoing.”³⁴ In summary, the blamed and their blameworthy act must be relevant to the blamer temporally and in terms of consequence, and the blamer must not be hypocritical or deaf to their own role in the act. As the first two are preconditions whose violation precedes even the committing of a blameworthy act, Cohen focuses on the latter two when describing how we lose standing. The first way, which is summed up by the phrase “look who’s talking!”³⁵ is an accusation that the blamer is just as bad, if not worse, than the blamed. The second way is if the blamer themselves is in part responsible for what they’re blaming, and itself has a few childish synopses, including “you started it!” and “you made me do it!”³⁶ Blaming you for losing the race when I finished in last place is groundless, and so too is doing so when I’m the one who tied your shoes together.

It is not obvious why this is the case. Sure, hypocritical blame is annoying, but that doesn’t mean it is unjustifiable as blame. One view is that the hypocrite doesn’t adequately understand the badness of the thing they’re blaming. If I’m actively participating in the act that I blame you for, it seems that perhaps I’m only using the act as an excuse to offend you, and don’t deeply consider it especially blameworthy in itself. Even if I claim that I blame myself just as I blame you, and therefore my hypocrisy shows no misunderstanding of the badness of the act, the very fact that I’ve asserted myself in the morally superior position of blamer suggests that I don’t truly see this. To show this, Cohen references Nietzsche’s quote that “he who despises himself still esteems the despiser within himself.”³⁷ Implicit in my blaming you for an act we both did is a differential assessment of the act when you did it as compared to I.

A second reason follows from this, which is that a hypocrite does not respect the blamed as a moral equal, and thus fails the precondition of standing that the two parties must belong to the same moral community. R. Jay Wallace’s position, as summarized by Bell, argues that “in failing to critically scrutinize

their own attitudes and past behavior as they adopt hostile attitudes towards others, hypocrites treat others' interests as less important than their own."³⁸ To expand, blame is one part of a larger social system of morality, to which self-scrutiny also belongs. By failing to self-scrutinize, the would-be blamer has exited the system, and as such has lost their ability to blame. This could be interpreted as saying that a lack of self-awareness, the type that would lead to hypocritical blaming, is sufficient to deprive one of moral agency in key ways. Even those unwilling to go that far, however, agree with Wallace in disempowering a hypocrite's blame on the basis of them lacking moral standing.

I.xiii | Standing to Blame in the Rejection of Circumstantial Luck

We must now ask: how do we apply these limitations on blame to the conundrum that follows from denying circumstantial moral luck? Again, the conundrum is that we have minimal certainty in the blameworthiness or blamelessness of most everyone, considering our cluelessness over how they might react to circumstances they've not been faced with. And if we take *standing-to-blame* arguments to mean that one who's blameworthy for a given act cannot condemn another for that act, we're left uncertain over who exactly can do the blaming of those who deserve it. To clarify, in the earlier comparison of a morally unlucky German and a morally lucky Canadian, our main issue lay in how to assess the Canadian, with the German's matter fairly settled. The details of a successful blame framework are as yet unclear, but it's tough to imagine one which wholly forgives the Nazi. However, if we accept that blame is not merely a statement of badness but instead an act done by a blaming actor unto a blamed actor, we need a second piece of the puzzle for the German to get what's coming to him: a blamer. Who might this blamer be? Well, it must be someone who themselves isn't as blameworthy as him, meaning someone who would not become a Nazi in his circumstance. Who among us fits this bill? It's not clear.

One person who would be obvious: the person who was faced with the same choice as the German and rebelled, Oskar Schindler for example. But that is simply accepting circumstantial luck, not satisfyingly resolving it. For the rest of us, we can't strongly say that we'd pass the moral test and gain the proper standing, certainly not by appeal to us being the right *type of person*. Our standing to blame for even the most

vile acts is in danger, unless we've managed to avoid those acts in the past when presented with the opportunity to perform them.

It's not clear that this directly follows from Cohen's view. The interpretation of *standing-to-blame* arguments used here is that "one who's blameworthy for a given act cannot condemn another for that act," yet Cohen never explicitly says such a thing. Phrase it not as *one who's blameworthy for* but rather *one who's done* a given act cannot condemn another for that act, and we may be able to skirt around our problem. In that interpretation, circumstantially lucky agents, those who *would have* done the bad act if given a chance, maintain the standing to blame, for they have not actually done that act. This, however, goes against the clear spirit of the position. Hypocriticism involves that which is criticized being present in both the critic and the criticized. If we accept that we blame actors, not acts, then what causes one to be a hypocrite is that *they* are blameworthy in the way the blamed is blameworthy, not merely that they have done the act which the blamed's blameworthiness manifested itself as. If the blamed is being accused of a moral failing as an agent (as shown by some problematic act), and the blamer has simply done that problematic act in a way which did not exhibit their moral failing as an agent, then they are not actually a hypocrite, and have thus not lost their standing to blame. It would be an abuse of the *standing-to-blame* argument to say that the clumsy accidental thief referenced earlier can't blame one who intentionally thieved. So, it must be the case that what *standing-to-blame* arguments are impugning in the would-be blamer is that they, as an agent, possess the same moral fault as the one they're blaming another for.

Now that we've clarified that one loses their standing to blame by possessing the same moral inadequacies as is the basis for their blaming, not only by doing the same bad act, we see that our problem with finding blamers is a serious one. We are seeking candidates who are free of a transgression we cannot be sure they're free of, who satisfy an unprovable counterfactual. Perhaps we should just give everyone the benefit of the doubt, and afford standing to all who have yet to face relevant circumstances as well as those who've acted admirably in those circumstances. As *standing-to-blame* arguments are limitations of blame, though, it is hard to envision that this is satisfactory to its proponents. What type of policy would place

stricter limits on who can and can't do something, then show an indiscriminate faith in those who can't prove they're up to snuff? Not an effective framework of blame.

It is implausible to deny that a nontrivial group of circumstantially lucky others would have joined the Nazis had they been presented with the opportunity, including, as I argue above, a nontrivial group of people who don't appear to be the right *type of person* to do so. The same, I believe, goes for a vast majority of ethical failures. If we don't suspend the ability to blame for individuals who've yet to be faced with the test whose failure they're blaming another for, we're allowing a large number of people who should have no standing to blame to blame. And to echo my earlier point, as *standing-to-blame* arguments are foremost methods of preventing unjust blaming, protecting the rights of the blamed, if you will, it is reasonable to continue by slightly altering Blackstone's ratio for an effective legal system: it is better that ten blameworthy men go unblamed, than one blameless man get blamed. As such, we are cautiously left bracketing all of our standings to blame for most everything, unless we've morally passed the situation whose failure we're basing our blame on.

I.xiv | Where This Leaves Us

We conclude this section in a rather grim place. The problem of moral luck has exemplified to us that our intuitive notions of blame and responsibility are flawed. We cannot at once desire blame to be of an agent for something exclusively reflecting their moral self and accept the truism that certain preconditions for potential blameworthiness are often completely unrelated to their moral self. The only difference between the circumstantially morally lucky and unlucky may be their presence at a certain place at a certain time, independent of morally relevant factors. Attempts to bypass this difference through careful observation of individuals outside of a given moral decision so as to know the choice they *would* make all fail, for circumstances are active, not passive, participants in a moral decision, and thus don't act as a canvas for agents to circumscribe their moral character upon, but instead uniquely prod an agent such that they may act differently than what we'd be able to predict. We're left deeply confused about who is more or less blameworthy than who else, seemingly only able to compare individuals who have faced the same

circumstances, so long as we hold on to a hope of blaming based on the moral character of the actor, not merely the act.

This is made all the worse if we accept that justifiable blame requires standing. For a key element of standing to blame, perhaps *the* cardinal element of it, is that the blamer not be a hypocrite. Understanding hypocrite as meaning one who shares the moral flaws they are blaming another for, and not just that one has done the exact morally bad act they are blaming another based on, we come to see that blamers may be in short supply. In order for one to have standing, they must be less blameworthy than the would-be blamed, but, of course, we're unsure of who is. Unless, again, the blamer has passed the moral test they're blaming the blamed for failing, they're prevented from blaming at all. Most everyone is potentially as blameworthy as most everyone else, yet almost nobody can actually do the blaming!

Notes

1. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Section I.3 (cited in Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 24)
2. Zimmerman, *Moral Luck: A Partial Map*, 590
3. Ibid
4. Ibid, 591-593
5. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 25
6. Ibid, 28
7. Ibid
8. Ibid, 34
9. Zimmerman, *Moral Luck: A Partial Map*, 602
10. Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor*, 14
11. Zimmerman, *Taking Luck Seriously*, 564
12. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 35
13. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, VII.2, 65-66
14. Latus, *Moral and Epistemic Luck*, 155
15. Ibid
16. Sher, *In Praise of Blame*, 18
17. Ibid, 21
18. Ibid, 26
19. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 187 (cited in Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 158)
20. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 26
21. Harman, *Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error*, 317
22. Ibid, 315
23. O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, 40
24. Ibid, 45
25. Ibid, 44

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26. Ibid, 57, 59
27. Lamar, XXX
28. Ibid
29. Ibid
30. Wolf, *Freedom Within Reason*, 53
31. Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment* (in Fischer and Ravizza, *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility*, 55)
32. Ibid, 64
33. Cohen, *Casting the First Stone: Who Can, and Who Can't, Condemn the Terrorists?*, 119
34. Bell, *The Standing to Blame: A Critique* (in Coates and Tognazzini, *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, 264)
35. Cohen, *Casting the First Stone: Who Can, and Who Can't, Condemn the Terrorists?*, 121, 122
36. Ibid, 126
37. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (cited in Cohen, *Casting the First Stone: Who Can, and Who Can't, Condemn the Terrorists?*, 122)
38. Bell, *The Standing to Blame: A Critique* (in Coates and Tognazzini, *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, 274)

Part II: Building Anew

SY: No one is playing the “blame game,” Larry.

LARRY: I didn’t say anyone was!

JUDITH: Well, let’s not play “he said, she said” either.

— Joel Coen & Ethan Coen, *A Serious Man*

II.i | Where We Stand

We enter this section with our intuitions seemingly stretched every which way. We want to blame bad people for their being bad, but the best we can do is blame people who do bad actions independent of their moral character, perhaps even their level of autonomy. Proposed solutions tend to fall into the pit of over-intellectualized abstraction. If we are to stick to the world of real interactions, we must accept that some good people will get blamed and some bad people will avoid blame, simply in virtue of their happening to be somewhere at a certain time. Fine, then, but at least we can cross the obvious cases off the list, blaming the people who both are bad and do bad, then figuring out the mixed cases later, right? Well, no. Maybe some of them, but for all of those moral tests that we ourselves have not passed, we may not have the proper standing to blame, for that demands we not be hypocrites, something we often can’t know about ourselves. In sum, we’ve torn down the house of traditional blame, in some cases with the wrecking ball of moral luck and in some cases by showing that it’s only a cardboard cutout of a house—that is, all the appearance without any of the utility.

There is no doubt that the points made in Part I pose problems for traditional conceptions of blame, but it’s also hard to avoid a sense that there was some slight-of-hand involved, that I was describing one thing here and another thing there. Like maybe the “blame” relevant to *standing-to-blame* arguments are different from what Hume was talking about, both of which are completely inapplicable to a Kendrick Lamar song. This is only a natural byproduct of the inconsistencies of contemporary blame discourse which, as stated in the quote opening this section, often feels like a bit of “he said, she said.” To clear the air a bit, I will commence this section by exploring three questions: what different things we might be talking about when making a moral judgment, what different pillars we might be relying on when talking about moral

responsibility, and what given locution we might be using when we say that we “blame” someone. This should leave us better equipped to see what exactly is, and is not, part of my interpretation of *blame*; which elements are set-in-stone and which are left fluid. I will not tailor my interpretation to responding to these questions, for to do so would be itself an instance of over-intellectualization—the prioritization of what philosophers tend to talk about above what real people do and can do.

I will move on to build a new interpretation of blame (and its partner-in-crime, criticism) which is both relevant to real-world scenarios and satisfactorily works through the problems presented by circumstantial moral luck. It makes use of key components from three other philosophical projects, each of which I detail after the aforementioned preliminary questions, and after which I expand on what my interpretation of blame and criticism is, how it comes into play, and how it responds to certain objections. I then will explain how exactly this new interpretation resolves the issues presented by circumstantial moral luck, and other implications it has for moral responsibility in general.

II.ii | What are the Different Types of Moral Judgments?

It is vital, when discussing moral judgments such as blame or criticism, to account for the varied forms of such judgments. As was the case with the Kantian control principle, the best elaboration on different types of moral judgments comes from Zimmerman. He delineates “three broad classes of such judgments: *aretaic* judgments, having to do with moral virtue and vice; *deontic* judgments, having to do with moral obligation; and what I will call *hypological* judgments, having to do with moral responsibility.”¹ These can be interpreted such that they start to collapse onto each other, for example, if someone were to say that “one is morally responsible for having done something if and only if one had a moral obligation not to do that thing but did it nonetheless.”² In that case, if it were agreed that a negative deontic judgment was appropriate, it would be superfluous to ask if a negative hypological judgment was; of course the answer is yes! Still, the separation is useful. In most cases, one’s violation of an obligation need not make them responsible, and one’s responsibility for an impermissible act need not make them vicious.

I will leave any explicit commentary on aretaic judgments aside, though those interested in virtue and vice will likely find that many of the positions I go over have something, at least indirectly, to say about them. In regards to deontic judgments, a good starting point is *Kant's Law*, where “‘ought’ implies ‘can,’ [...] if one ought not to do something, one can refrain from doing it.”³ On this view, there are certain moral obligations that one has—whatever a normative framework dictates they may be. These obligations must be possible to do for those who are obligated. One cannot be morally obligated to leap to the moon or prove the truth of $A \wedge \sim A$. If one violates an obligation—say, by lying, to a Kantian—they would be deserving of a negative deontic judgment.

There are dissenters.[§] Bruce Waller, for example, sees *Kant's Law* as only a side effect of the Christian notion of a morally well-ordered world. “In such a system, obligations and capacities must coincide: a just God would give no obligations beyond our abilities to fulfill them. But in the natural world, there is no such assurance.”⁴ If we leave behind Christian metaphysics and detach deontic from hypological judgments such that not everyone who violates an obligation is blameworthy, there’s no reason to hold onto this “implausible idealization of moral agency.”⁵ Another way to go is by “distinguishing senses of ‘ought,’ and arguing that at least one important sense does not imply ‘can’”⁶ as was suggested by C.D. Broad.^{**}

This is enough on deontic judgments for the time being, seeing as though my main focus is on blame, which is generally a hypological judgment. We can now see the type of ground that we’re walking on when evaluating an act (or feature). Even just in terms of that act’s relationship to obligation, seemingly the most straightforward of the three types of judgments, we see confusion. Many are drawn to understand it as a human goal—something which we necessarily can and have reasons to do—others view it as something

[§] Further discussion of them can be found in the “Obligation Presupposes Alternatives” chapter in Haji’s *Luck's Mischief*.

^{**} Mark Schroeder terms a version of this as the “naive view,” which he supports by separating out *deliberative* oughts from *evaluative* oughts. “The deliberative ‘ought’ relates agents to actions, interpreted as a kind of property of agents”⁷ while “‘ought’ also has an *evaluative* sense, on which it means, roughly, that were things ideal, some proposition would be the case.”⁸ In other words, to say one “ought” to do something in the evaluative sense is to say that that is the very best possible thing to do, to say one “ought” to do something in the deliberative sense is to say that that is the best option they have given their limitations—that is, the best option that they *can* do. Schroeder imagines Larry, a man who’s come on especially hard emotional and financial times, and needs an influx of money to pay for medical expenses. Compare the statements “Larry ought to win the lottery” (“Larry deserves to win the lottery, if anyone does,”⁹ he says) with “Larry ought not steal from old ladies” and you have the difference between the evaluative and deliberative ought according to Schroeder.

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closer to a metaphysical standard or a Platonic Form—an ideal that, in the messy world we live in, can only guide us barring some sort of transcendence. The tendencies of dialogues on deontic judgments to hit unhelpful bedrock incompatibilities are one of the reasons I argue in favor of severing their connection to blame in Part III. When we shift to hypological judgments, things get even messier.

II.iii | What Do We Base Responsibility On?

Another confusion that emerges in blame discourse is what underlies a blame act. That is, what is the paradigm in which blame belongs? This is slightly different than the various things we hold synonymous with a phrase like “I blame you,” which is discussed in the next subsection. Instead, this is more like asking the question, “what justifies blaming one person compared to another.” When we understand what potential endgoals of blame are, we will better understand when blame is appropriate and what we mean to be doing when we blame someone.

A good method of distinguishing two camps here is done by Judith Andre. She argues that the moral luck only appears to be a problem to someone like Nagel because he’s understanding blame in multiple paradigms at once—the “Kantian” and “Aristotelian” paradigms. “The Kantian concept [...] is closely linked to Christian ideas of reward and punishment by an all-just, omniscient God,”¹⁰ whereas the Aristotelian concept is simply about doing the right things with the right intentions. Put another way, it is a split between those who think blame is mostly about punishment and those who think blame is mostly about being or acting bad.

As Andre points out, typical moral discourse involves a combination of Kantian and Aristotelian conceptualizations; “Whenever we praise people as moral we mean they are worthy of praise and emulation; but only sometimes do we mean that they are worthy of reward.”¹¹ Yet, when we’re attempting to understand potential inconsistencies in our hypological evaluations, we must be careful to know what terrain we’re operating upon. “‘Responsible’ has two kinds of application,” she writes, “one is what I’ve called the Christian-Kantian sense: the responsible party is subject to reward and punishment. The other sense is more prosaic: to be responsible is to have an obligation to rectify bad consequences.”¹² When we say that the

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morally lucky and unlucky individuals are differentially responsible, we seem to only mean that they're so in the Aristotelian paradigm.

Andre, of course, is only using terms like “Kantian” and “Aristotelian” as shorthand, but we can look back to *Nicomachean Ethics* to see just how different a place Aristotle is coming from as compared to the Kantian Christianity. For example, his wholesale denial of the Kant quote at the beginning of Part I, which sought to show that a good will would “sparkle like a jewel in its own right” even when failing to perform its action. To Aristotle, “just as Olympic prizes are not for the finest and strongest, but for contestants, since it is only these who win; so also in life the fine and good people who *act* correctly win the prize”¹³ [italics mine]. The impotent good will, to him, is like the world-beating sprinter who stays at home and watches the 100 meters on his couch. And while he likes to claim that “anyone who is not deformed in his capacity for virtue will be able to achieve happiness through some sort of learning and attention,”¹⁴ he is also willing to concede that “happiness evidently also needs external goods to be added, since we cannot, or cannot easily, do fine actions if we lack the resources.”¹⁵

Of course, Aristotle himself ran into certain contradictions pertaining to moral luck, as, despite his acceptance of the need for “external goods,” he liked to reserve praise and blame only for “voluntary” actions, but the fact remains that we can understand two distinct frameworks at play. On the Aristotelian one, responsibility is like a race—they who finish first win, they who finish last lose. This pays no mind to who's actually the *fastest*. Further, it pays no mind to who's the most *deserving*, say, if we compare a self-taught, never-say-die hard worker with a heart of gold with an unsportsmanlike, privately-trained slacker pumped full of steroids. Analogously, one is blameworthy if they've contributed to something bad—if they've done something demanding rectification—even if they're not a bad person, or if it seems unfair that they should be blamed as such, say, due to moral bad luck. On the Kantian framework, responsibility is about nothing *but* desert. One is blameworthy if they deserve to be punished, with an assumption that a perfect judge (i.e.: God; though, “even an atheist can ask what such a Judge *would* do”¹⁶) is deciding the case. Again, few people invoke pure forms of these paradigms; Aristotle himself would surely find fault in whatever the moral equivalent is to giving a gold medal to a cheating sprinter, but grasping the distinctions is enlightening.

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A second division splits up “forward-looking” and “backwards-looking” views. One may understand the basis of blame being “to improve the culprit’s conduct by addressing her sense of what is morally acceptable.”¹⁷ Thus blaming someone is not actually about the act or feature which prompted the blame, it is instead about preventing such acts or features from appearing again in the future. Alternatively, one might hold that the basis of blame must focus on the act in question, meaning that it must be looking at the past.

On the one hand, one might support the forward-looking interpretation on the strength of an aforementioned Humean fear that “actions are by their very nature temporary and perishing; [...] [it proceeds] from nothing inside [the actor], that is durable or constant, and leaves nothing of that nature behind it.”¹⁸ In other words, by the time we get around to doing the blaming, the blameworthy act is over and done with. What we should be focusing on instead is how that act relates to the present and future. On the other hand, one might support the backwards-looking interpretation on the grounds that hypological judgments are not exclusively instrumental in such a fashion; like how a deontic judgment is fundamentally an assessment of a past act’s relationship to obligation, a hypological judgment functions the same way, simply with a *responsibility* component added on. Of course, many have equivocated, such as Victoria McGeer, who writes that blame “should have both the backward-looking appraisal dimension *and* a forward-looking regulative dimension. That is to say, we should certainly care about what attitudes individuals manifest in their behavior. But if those attitudes are interpersonally deficient in some way, we should care equally about seeing a change in those attitudes.”¹⁹

II.iv | What Are We Doing When We Blame?

The previous question, regarding the general space in which hypological judgments operate, lends itself well to another question: what do these hypological judgments *mean*? We know what they mean in a certain sense, just in virtue of their basis, such that we know for some people a blame judgment *means* “you deserve to be punished.” But that is less what the blamer is saying than what justifies their saying it. When I say “that was a really bad three-pointer you just took,” it’s true that I mean “that three-point shot contributed to us losing the game” in that such a fact justifies my claim, but in a more direct sense, what I mean is “that

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shot had a very slim chance of going in, and there was a teammate open right underneath the hoop.”

Typically, when making an evaluative statement, we only indirectly reference the endgoal of the paradigm in which our evaluation is being made. Instead, we reference some intermediary which we implicitly hold to be connected to that endgoal. Even if the rules of basketball were switched such that the team with the *least* amount of points won, my saying “that was a really bad shot you just took” would still have meaning as “that shot had a very slim chance of going in” even if it was no longer correct that “that shot contributed to us losing the game.” In a similar sense, a blame act will have a specific meaning that it’s *necessarily* referencing, which is only *contingently* connected to the general paradigm (e.g.: Aristotelian or Kantian).

For these specific meanings, the easiest method again is to split things up into two camps. The first camp sees blaming someone as “judging that there is a ‘discredit’ or ‘debit’ in his ‘ledger,’ or a ‘negative mark’ in his ‘report card,’ or a ‘blemish’ or ‘stain’ on his ‘record’; that his ‘record’ has been ‘tarnished’; that his ‘moral standing’ has been ‘diminished.’”²⁰ This eclectic group of metaphors all point to a similar thing. An agent has good or bad actions, features, or whatever else attributed to them which, over time, form a complete accounting of who they are as a moral being. To say you *blame* someone else is to add another entry on the “bad” side of the ledger. Put another way, “when blameworthy, one’s moral worth is diminished.”²¹

A similar position is taken by Gary Watson, who conflates two of the types of judgments I laid out at the beginning of this section, by saying, “Because many of these appraisals [of praise and blame] concern the agent’s excellences and faults—or virtues and vices—as manifested in thought and action, I shall say that such judgments are made from the *aretaic perspective*.”²² So, if we blame an agent, we are saying that they have committed a vice, or that what they’ve done is “a poor exercise of human evaluative capacities, as characteristic of someone who cares little about standards of excellence.”²³ Thus, the Watsonian *aretaic* interpretation of blame can be seen as stronger than a stripped-down moral accounting view, where a person’s “moral worth” is defined by a comparison of goods to bads, because it makes implications about the agent’s relationship to excellence—that they’ve moved further away from a certain *telos*. It is a claim that “the conduct in question expresses the agent’s own evaluative commitments, her adoption of some ends among others.”²⁴

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The second camp is captained by P.F. Strawson. I've already referred to Strawson, but to clarify his objective (which is always a bit opaque), he looks at what it means to have responsibility, pitting "pessimists" on one side and "optimists" on the other. The pessimists claim that moral responsibility requires autonomy, and believing that the thesis of determinism might be true, conclude that it may be impossible to ever really be morally responsible. The optimists claim that moral responsibility is justified by many things having nothing to do with autonomy, often by pointing "to the efficacy of the practices of punishment, and of moral condemnation and approval, in regulating behaviour in socially desirable ways,"²⁵ and thus conclude that determinism poses no threat one way or the other.

Dissatisfied with both sides, Strawson argues for the primacy of the blame act to blameworthiness. That is to say, we don't blame someone because we deem them blameworthy in some metaphysical sense. Instead, we deem someone blameworthy because we've had some reaction, in the form of an attitude, which points to their blameworthiness. "Only by attending to this range of attitudes can we recover from the facts as we know them a sense of what we mean, i.e. of *all* we mean, when, speaking the language of morals, we speak of desert, responsibility, guilt, condemnation, and justice."²⁶

This type of position can be taken in a number of directions. Gary Watson views Strawson as saying that reactive attitudes "are *constitutive* of moral responsibility; to regard oneself or another as responsible just is the proneness to react to them in these kinds of ways under certain conditions."²⁷ On this interpretation, evoking resentment in another is both necessary and sufficient for being blameworthy. R. Jay Wallace, on the other hand, posits a version which "says, at most, that judgments of moral *blame* are to be understood as involving the expression of reactive attitudes" but "does not entail that such judgments are *exclusively* expressive."²⁸ An additional component that may or may not be involved is the notion of *demands*. Strawson originally appeared to argue that they are required, that "when we express and direct our resentment or indignation at a norm violator, we demand some rectifying response,"²⁹ as Margaret Urban Walker puts it, while those such as Colleen Macnamara find that "this is a deep mistake" and that there is "little we have to lose by taking demands out of the attitudes associated with blame."³⁰ And like Watson's bolstering of the moral ledger view by collapsing it into aretaic judgments, the reactive attitude view can similarly be

strengthened. Take Roger Wertheimer's conflation of attitude-based condemnation and punishment in his claim that "condemning is a hostile attitude or an act motivated by and manifesting that attitude" which "favor[s] some suffering for the condemned."³¹

These two categories—moral ledger and reactive attitude—even when interpreted liberally, do not nearly encompass every view. D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini, in the introduction to their anthology on blame, identify four general such categories: "cognitive accounts" (clinical evaluations), "conative accounts" (judgments with both evaluative and emotional or dispositional components), "the Strawsonian account," and "functional accounts" (something like Strawson's "optimist," understanding blame in terms of the function it serves).³² However, this is a sufficient sketch of two common positions, and allows us to understand the difference between this subsection and the last. To one holding the moral ledger view, when someone asks "what exactly did you mean when you said 'I blame you?'" they can respond "I meant that I'm adding a negative mark to your moral ledger." But it is a different question altogether when one asks, "now just what exactly is this moral ledger all about? Does a bad score mean that someone has a lot of wrongs they haven't made right, or does it mean they deserve to go straight to Hell?" Even for a follower of Watson, who invokes Aristotelian terminology of virtue and vice, it is still possible to simultaneously hold the view that to deem one blameworthy is to claim they've committed a vice, but that the entire concept of blameworthiness is supported by a reward-punishment ("Kantian") paradigm, and not a rectification-for-wrongdoing ("Aristotelian") paradigm. When generating an interpretation of blame, both of these types of questions should be considered.

With these matters analyzed, we can now move onto my interpretation, which opens with a discussion of three philosophical projects from whom I've heavily borrowed and combined.

II.v | Hume's Empathy

The first moral project to look at is that of David Hume. Seeking to expound what morality might be in the absence of God or prescriptive reason, and believing that pride and humility—both of whose object is the self—sits at the base of most all passions that humans have, Hume turned to the faculty of *sympathy*. "No

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quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences,” he writes, “than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own.”³³ As the strongest passions are pointed towards the self, *sympathy* isn’t simply the effect of noticing a certain attitude in another, but is the subsequent feeling of that attitude in oneself. I feel humbled when I believe I have done something bad; when someone else does something bad, I recognize some form of myself in them, and experience a sort of vicarious humility, which can be called blame. At its most affective, *sympathy* can lead us to feel the pleasure, pain, pride, or humility of another almost exactly as if we’d experienced it ourselves. Unlike other forms of moral judgement, which seek to evaluate another in reference to moral principles, Hume’s moral judgement evaluates them in reference to the evaluator. He posits that “no person is ever praised by another for any quality, which would not, if real, produce, of itself, a pride in the person possess of it.”³⁴ Without an understanding of what another’s act were to mean to us if we were to do it, we’ve a difficult time making sense of its morality.

This creates a finicky blame paradigm, prone to the whims of the blamer. Foremost, we may fear that the blamer is *sympathizing* with the wrong things. Perhaps I only praise acts that I’d be proud to have done myself, but what if I’m proud of tripping old ladies and running pyramid schemes? What if I’m *never* ashamed? Hume denies this based on a sense of human nature as in some way universal. “Consider that in all nations and ages, the same objects still give rise to pride and humility; and that upon the view even of a stranger, we can know pretty nearly, what will either increase or diminish his passions of this kind.”³⁵ If we buy this, that we can generally trust blamers in not finding vicarious pride or humility in the wrong things, the question becomes about their aptitude for *sympathy* in different cases. To Hume, *sympathy* is not a question of *if* but *when*. *Sympathy* is baked into our psychology, but it doesn’t always appear with equal magnitude. If I find your act to be worthy of pride, and thus praise you for it, but only just barely recognize myself as similar to you, perhaps only insofar as we’re both human beings, my praise will be far weaker than if a win for you truly feels like a win for me.

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Hume recognizes the greatest causes of differential *sympathy* to be resemblance, contiguity, and causation. When the object of our evaluation resembles us, when they're closer to us in space and time, or when we see ways in which they've influenced us, we find them easier to *sympathize* with them. Our praise and blame of them, therefore, will be disproportionately strong as compared to someone we're distantly related to. In an odd way, this can be seen as a form of moral luck—one which operates on the evaluator rather than the evaluated. While blame would not be offset by something external to the blamed's control—say, their resemblance to the evaluator—it can be attenuated or bolstered. His prescription is to offset these biases as much as possible, to minimize the role of luck. He offers the *general point of view*, a perspective which seeks to *sympathize* not just with the evaluated actor, but with the desires and aversions that the act would cause in all others as well, as the ideal for effective moral judgement. Just as some react to circumstantial moral luck by attempting to fabricate a purified form of the blamed, detached from their circumstance, Hume reacts to the biases of *sympathy* by attempting to fabricate a purified form of the blamer, detached from their *sympathy*-relevant relationships.

Thus, in Hume's moral picture what we have are moral judgements that are informed not by some strict notion that what the judged did was right or wrong, but rather by an awareness of shared humanity between the judge and the judged, and an exploration into what the judge thinks of hypothetically doing the act themselves. It is based in a faculty that is intrinsic to human psychology—*sympathy*—and thus unavoidable, as opposed to conceptions of moral judgements which require the judge to learn and understand a greater moral framework before they know how to make judgements. Unavoidable, but not infallible. Biases of this faculty, to Hume, require us to keep close tabs on them and compensate for shortcomings, in order to judge correctly.

II.vi | Scanlon's Relationships

The second key influence on my proposal is that of T.M. Scanlon, who posits a relationship-centered picture of blame. In its most distilled form, to blame someone for an action “is to take that action to indicate something about the person that impairs one's relationship with him or her, and to understand that

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relationship in a way that reflects that impairment.”³⁶ Like Hume, Scanlon sees blame as derived foremost from the interpersonal connection between the blamer and the blamed, not something essentially immoral in the blamed. One blames someone *for* violating a relationship, not a principle, and they blame someone *by* damaging that relationship, not the blamed or the blamed’s reputation.

To understand Scanlon’s claim, we must understand its purpose. He describes it as an *interpretation* rather than an *analysis* of blame, in that an *analysis* “would suggest a higher degree of clarity and specificity in the object of analysis than I believe exists” while an *interpretation* “will be in some way revisionary: accepting it will involve changing our minds about some things we previously were inclined to believe,” but still “should be as faithful as possible to the phenomenology of blaming and to our judgements about when it is appropriate to blame people and in what degree.”³⁷ All that is to say, he is not attempting simply to expound what blame *is*, but is rather constructing a novel picture of blame that works where other pictures fail, but which causes no fundamental dissonance with standard understandings or practices of morality. It may be different than how we typically explain blame, but it works in step with the feelings and experiences that we’ve had when involved in instances of blame. I believe my proposal of blame to have the same goal.

The next step in grasping Scanlon’s blame is to clarify the concept of *relationship*. To him, a relationship is no more than “a set of intentions and expectations about our actions and attitudes towards each other that are justified by certain facts about us.”³⁸ Different types of relationships—whether they be as friends, lovers, neighbors, supporters of the same cause, or in some unnamed capacity—feature different sets of ideal attitudes and intentions that the related parties should have towards each other. These may or may not be perfectly reciprocal. When interactions between two parties conform sufficiently closely to one of these ideals, we can reasonably call it that kind of relationship.

On first glance, the substitution of the “intentions and expectations” of a relationship in for more traditional moral imperatives might look like a distinction without a difference. If I’ve formed a friend relationship with you, which involves the expectation that I’ll help you move into your new apartment, then fail to fulfill that expectation, what is the difference between being blamed because I’ve violated the expectation of the relationship versus being blamed because I’ve violated a moral imperative to ‘help out

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others when it's not too difficult,' or something of the like? Are the inviolable intentions and expectations of a relationship just conditional commandments, the condition being that they exist in the confines of the relationship, and therefore little different than Kantian hypothetical imperatives? Is it only that insofar as we want to maintain a given relationship, it is blameworthy to infringe on certain key principles which maintain it?

One point against this analogizing is the fact that attitudes and intentions are fundamentally different from the types of things traditional imperatives seek to blame for. It is one thing to blame someone for *doing* something, or even various permutations such as *thinking of doing* something, that might harm a relationship, but another to blame someone for understanding a relationship in a certain way. True, the way one acts or potentially acts in a relationship may be the best sign of how they understand it, but those are the symptoms, not the disease. The disease, Scanlon's object of blame, is the status of the *relationship* itself; how the blamer views the blamed, how the blamed views the blamer, and how both view the *us* that they form together. When an agent is blameworthy, it is not necessarily about what they've *done*, but instead about a recognition of a certain state of affairs, wherein that agent's attitude toward another fails to live up to what their relationship would demand.

Another point is Scanlon's separation of blame from blameworthiness. As we can understand a relationship without being part of it, anyone has the ability to judge someone as *blameworthy* for an action, or "to claim that the action shows something about the agent's attitudes towards others that impairs the relation that others can have with her."³⁹ But actually blaming involves the blamer using this blameworthiness as motivation to go ahead and reciprocate that impairment. If a friend does something that I believe suggests they don't view me in the way friends are meant to view each other, I believe they're *blameworthy*. If I then alter my attitude towards them, such that I no longer view them as friends are meant to view each other, I've *blamed* them. Unlike traditional imperatives, where an agent being blameworthy is typically good enough reason to blame them, barring certain *standing-to-blame* snags (as were discussed in Part I), to Scanlon, "the appropriate response will [...] depend on the person's exact relation to the blameworthy action and the attitudes it reveals."⁴⁰ What sense is there to be made of reciprocating an impairment to a relationship that

one barely has? The *blameworthiness*, the recognition that one has impaired their relationships with others, is reasonable, but that's where our power as evaluators stop. The ability to blame is blamer-dependent.

Scanlon's proposal features the benefit of a strong justification for blame. As he points out, often "blaming seems to involve adopting an unattractive position of superiority, as a moral judge of others."⁴¹ There are substantial arguments to be made in defense of this type of blame, say as a method of discouraging future bad acts or of asserting a moral code, but there is still no doubt that, to the less combative of us, blaming is unsavory in its apparent self-deification. *Standing-to-blame* arguments wonder when we lose the grounds to blame. Some—especially in the context of religious doctrines of self-humility and forgiveness—may wonder when we gain it in the first place.

For Scanlon, blame is an essential outgrowth from forming meaningful relationships at all. The only precondition for blame is that two parties have certain attitudes towards each other, and the only result is that these attitudes change reciprocally. The blamer is not deified, it is not as if he's claiming, 'this person is below me, unworthy of maintaining a relationship with.' It is instead a claim that the blamed shall expect from the blamer, in terms of attitudes and intentions, what the blamer now expects from the blamed. "The complete rejection of blame will rule out important relations with others,"⁴² as it will mean there are no relationships involving special and dynamic, and therefore breakable, attitudes and intentions. These blameless relationships would either be equally flattened and static, involving one having the same attitudes and intentions towards everyone, or unequal and static, meaning all friendships, romances, and like would be maintained by nothing except pure inertia—like two incompatible people staying in a romance 'because it's easier than breaking up' writ large.

Scanlon's complete moral project, even limiting ourselves to that which deals with responsibility, is highly complex, and as with Hume, what I've presented here has only scratched its surface. I've focused on what I see as essential influences on my formulation of a new conception of blame, that is: that blame comes from, and results in, a blamer's understanding of their relationship with the blamed. It is highly dependent upon the nature of the blamer, not just in their actual history with the blamed, but with their perceived relational status, and thus even the same act in two apparently symmetrical relationships can lead to different

blame-based impairments if the apparently symmetrical relationships were not perceived in the same way by the respective blamers. Further, while neither blameworthiness nor blame exist in a vacuum—both are dictated by the relationship as it was understood preceding the act in question—the two concepts are separated, such that we may be incentivized against blaming one who we consider blameworthy. What we're left with is the basis for a dynamic conception of blame, more capable of functioning in the real world than many others.

II.vii | Strawson's Points of View

The final influence I will look into is P.F. Strawson. I've already discussed Strawson as it relates to his conception of blame as a reactive attitude, but here I will look at his idea of the subjective and objective points of view. If you recall, Strawson's goal was to reconcile the pessimistic adherents to "panicky metaphysics of libertarianism," who claim that there is no such thing as moral responsibility if determinism is true, with the optimistic adherents to "one-eyed utilitarianism,"⁴³ who hold that the reasons for maintaining practices of blame come from their pragmatic results, and thus are unaffected by determinism. His solution, in simplest form, was to reframe the discussion as one not about the intelligibility of praise and blame in the face of questions about free will, but rather as one about the effects and manifestations of praise and blame *given* that they occur. Not a metaphysical analysis of whether we can blame, but a social analysis of how we do blame. Instead of first defining responsibility, then blame, then figuring out how to blame, Strawson argues that how we blame is most primitive, and in turn it is those blame practices which illuminate what blame is. Blaming occurs through reactive attitudes; we do not resent someone because we deem them metaphysically blameworthy, but blame them because we've reacted to their act with something like resentment.

The primacy of attitudes in blame practices does not mean they're the genesis point of interpersonal interaction. Besides what we're reacting to, our reactive attitudes result from our understanding of the actor preceding their act. Here again, like with Hume and Scanlon, we see an understanding of blame as dependent upon the state of affairs between the blamer and the blamed preceding the basis for blame. For Hume this vital state of affairs was the blamer's ability to *sympathize* with the blamed, for Scanlon it was the intentions

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and expectations of their relationship with the blamed, and for Strawson it is the level of “detachment from the actions or agents which are the objects [of blame].”⁴⁴ Being detached versus being attached—or reactive—maps onto his objective and subjective points of view.

The objective point of view is clinical. It sees an actor “as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense, might be called treatment.”⁴⁵ An overly objective point of view is what dissatisfied workers accuse their employer of when they believe they’re being seen only as ‘numbers on payroll,’ but it need not go this far. It can also apply to one who’s trying to ‘take a step back’ from a situation and ‘see it with a clear head,’ to one who makes heavy appeal to precedent and logic when making an evaluation. A form of it is Hume’s “general point of view” which sought to remove the idiosyncratic relational aspect from a judgement.

By contrast, the subjective point of view is based in affect. To understand it, Strawson falls back on the primacy of attitude, in that taking the subjective point of view towards another is to understand them as a reasonable target of a reactive attitude. There are reactions which are only appropriate in the context of a relationship which involves a certain level of expected goodwill between participants—relationships between subjects, not a subject and an object. He elaborates on this distinction:

The objective attitude may be emotionally toned in many ways, but not in all ways: it may include repulsion or fear, it may include pity or even love, though not all kinds of love. But it cannot include the range of reactive feelings and attitudes which belong to involvement or participation with others in interpersonal human relationships; it cannot include resentment, gratitude, forgiveness, anger, or the sort of love which two adults can sometimes be said to feel reciprocally, for each other.⁴⁶

In all, there are many overlaps between the three projects I’ve summarized. Perhaps most importantly, they all forego a reliance on imperative or obligation when making moral judgements, instead looking towards the specific statuses of the involved parties and their attitudes towards each other, both before and after the act in question. All three feature some role for the closeness with which the blamer

perceives themselves to be to the blamed, whether that closeness modulates their ability to adequately *sympathize*, what intentions and attitudes they expect, or what reactive attitudes are appropriate.

II.viii | *Separating Blame and Criticism*

The first step in my interpretation is to distinguish two forms of moral evaluation: blame and criticism. In this distinction, I look to walk the tightrope between a framework of moral evaluation which is too harsh and one which is too forgiving. In short, I conceive of them as such: *blame* is an attitude-based evaluation of personal failure of the blamed as a result of an empathetic viewing of them. It involves a recognition of the blamed as a sufficiently relatable subjectivity to the blamer, and understands them as having failed *through* the blamer's own experiences as a person who morally succeeds and fails. *Criticism* is a cognitive evaluation of an act in relation to a rule or set of rules. This need not be intentionally or through viciousness, depending on the normative framework at play, but rather is a simple matter of violating an objective and concrete standard. In a consequentialist utilitarian criticism framework, for example, one would be criticizable if they did something which contributed to a decrease in overall utility in the world, independent of all the other factors at play. Following G.E. Moore's consequentialism, criticism "does not imply that one is *culpable* if one fails to bring about the best consequences attainable; it only implies that one thereby does *wrong*."⁴⁷ On the flip side, to a pure deontologist criticism framework, one is criticizable if they've violated a duty, independent of all the other factors at play.

Criticizability acts as a sort of 'raw data' of negative moral evaluation. Sometimes it may seem unfair that one is criticized for something due to the external factors influencing it, but those are cases in which we should dull the stock we put into our criticism with things like justification or indifference. One can see another's actions as extremely worthy of criticism without seeing that fact as having any bearing on the criticized as an individual. To a deontologist critic, one who lies to the 'murderer at the door' asking about the location of his prey is criticizable, but probably forgivably so, in the sense that we may not choose to view the liar any differently. They've done *wrong*, but that's the beginning, not the end, of the conversation. Moving the goalposts so as to avoid the criticism altogether creates a shaky framework that can be easily manipulated. It is

one thing to claim that it is okay that one has done something bad, it is far more dangerous to start allowing people to write it off as not bad—to look at it uncritically, if you will.

Immediately, we see a place for Strawson's conception of attitudes at the heart of my *blame* and *criticism*. A precondition of *blaming* someone is viewing them from the subjective point of view, and the comparatively removed nature of *criticism* comes in large part from viewing the criticized from the objective point of view. To Strawson, viewing another as a subject meant viewing them as a potential target of a reactive attitude. I don't mean to contradict this, but rather offer an alternative notion of a subject, as it relates to blame, as instead one who we are able to meaningfully empathize with.

To *meaningfully empathize* means more than a simple 'stepping into their shoes,' more than merely knowing the various factors that might be affecting that person. It involves an emotional investment and a nontrivial understanding that we could be as that person is due to factors beyond our control. In what should now be familiar terms, this understanding involves a recognition of differential constitutive and circumstantial moral luck. To invoke Hume, the type of empathy where "[sentiments and passions] appear at first in *our* mind as mere ideas, and are conceiv'd to belong to another person, as we conceive of any other matter of fact,"⁴⁸ is insufficient. Instead, I am seeking the type of empathy which intimately ties evaluation of others together with self-evaluation, which understands others' acts as our own potential acts.

A useful barometer of this is Bernard Williams's definition of *agent-regret*, which is a specific kind of regret directed towards one's self. It is not *any* time that one regrets something that they did, he argues, "there can be cases of regret directed to one's own past actions which are not cases of agent-regret, because the past action is regarded purely externally, as one might regard anyone else's action."⁴⁹ This is something like taking the objective point of view towards one's self. No, agent-regret is defined by "a particular kind of expression."⁵⁰ To show this, he mentions the specific way we might expect a lorry driver to feel in response to accidentally running over a child, and how such a feeling would differ from any other bystander, even if the driver did nothing wrong. Williams argues that this feeling is limited to actions we've done ourselves, but I believe that we can generate something similar via empathy, but only meaningful empathy. Agent-regret is a

perfect candidate for the type of reactive attitude that would be involved in my conception of blame, and shows the level of empathy it demands.

This stringent standard on blame-relevant subjecthood opens up much leeway for the objective point of view through which we criticize. It need not be a dehumanizing, subordinating process, but only means that we are making an evaluation foremost of an actor's actions or features as they relate to specific rules and the world at-large, not personal successes or failures as they relate to us as evaluators and others as evaluatees. Another thing separating it from blame is that it is belief-based, not attitude-based. Where blame wades deep into the emotional territory of interpersonal interactions, and derives from an *attitude* that the blamed has failed as the blamer could fail, criticism derives from a *belief* that the criticized has violated a normative standard, such as that the world has less utility because of what the criticized has done. This belief is closely linked to a specific desire, in the words of Sher "that the person in question not have performed his past bad act or not have his current bad character."⁵¹ It might be similar to the sensation one gets in the wake of some unfortunate but understandable event, when they say something like "I can't blame you too much, but gosh, I just wish things had turned out differently than they did." Unlike Sher, who argues that such a desire constitutes blame, I am discussing only the preceding belief as constituting criticism, while admittedly the one will almost always come with the other. Very rarely does one believe something constitutes a violation of normative standards and not have some desire that it had turned out differently, and some normative frameworks are more welcoming than others to these two becoming disentangled.

II.ix | No Blame Without Criticism and No Criticism Without Blame

If we are to use Sher's conception of blame as an approximation for my conception of criticism, many of the arguments against the former will apply to the latter. Specifically, many have accused the backwards-looking "I wish you hadn't have done that" blame of being too passionless. As stated earlier, Christopher Evan Franklin claims that Sher defending "only a contingent connection between a commitment to morality and the reactive attitudes"⁵² constitutes a failed picture of blame. While these types of critiques are meant to point out a shortcoming for *blame*, it is not a stretch to apply them to my version of *criticism* as well.

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Since criticism can be interpersonal—as one agent criticizing another instead of one merely tossing criticism into the ether—it is easy to see that those heavily invested in reactive attitudes will find my criticism overly cold and heartless.† These Strawsonians will say that the belief that someone has violated a normative rule on its own is not enough to support an important type of interpersonal evaluation.

First, I must clarify that my conception of criticism is not intended to be passionless. Often, a dichotomy is drawn where one type of evaluation is emotional and the other is emotionless. I am not drawing such a dichotomy. Blame and criticism are differentiated based on the perception of that which is being blamed or criticized—as an actor existing within a normative framework or as a subjectivity that’s morally failed or succeeded—and not based on how exactly that blame or criticism manifests. To recall Strawson, “the objective attitude may be emotionally toned in many ways, but not in all ways.”⁵³ I don’t see why it’s thought to be odd that a consequentialist critic may experience an emotional reaction to the belief, and the belief alone, that the world has gotten worse as a consequence of some action or event. It’s very likely that this emotion is almost always present. Just because criticism is not constituted by an affective manifestation does not mean there is an expectation of total affective detachment. A more careful wording of the supposed dichotomy would be like that of Roger Wertheimer, who writes that “condemning is a hostile attitude or an act motivated by and manifesting that attitude. By contrast, evaluating, criticizing, disparaging, and the like are cognitive (or constative) acts; they *needn’t* involve feeling, willing, or wishing [italics mine].”⁵⁴ This *needn’t* as opposed to *can’t* does not directly answer some of the aforementioned arguments, which take issue with the emotional component being only *contingent*, which I still hold that it is, but is only to ask that objectors proceed cautiously before envisioning my ideal criticism as something like the monotone voice of HAL-9000.

The second way I resolve the issue through a concession; that yes, a most stripped-down manifestation of criticism appears unfit for real human interaction, but that type criticism never actually manifests. In fact, criticism never appears alone at all. So long as we maintain a semblance of a view of ourselves and others as both agents, even just in abstract fact, a negative moral evaluation is inherently existentially charged in some fashion. To say that another agent has violated a normative standard is

† An example of this from Susan Wolf is expanded on in “The Role of Reasons” subsection below.

necessarily part of one determining their own agency and role in the world. While there are certain facts that are both lifeless in themselves *and* lifeless in the hands of someone who believes them, other facts themselves are emotionally neutral, but cannot help but trigger certain emotions when they're believed. The propositions believed during an act of criticism are of the latter type. When we believe that someone has violated a normative standard, we come to *feel* some way about it, for we recognize that we too might live up to or fall short of this standard. As Hume said, sympathy is always present in our interactions. Put another way, there is always *some* subjective attitude contained within the objective attitude; there is always some blaming in criticism. And, to that end, there is always some criticism in blaming, as the negative reactive attitude which dictates blame will involve or contribute to some sort of belief about how to improve or worsen the world.

II.x | *What Occurs When One Blames*

At this point, I think it is appropriate to clarify how exactly a blame act would work in my picture, and how it relates to the projects of Hume, Scanlon, and Strawson. First, in the context of the two key camps I separated proposals of blame into earlier—the reactive attitude side and the moral ledger side—mine falls towards the side of reactive attitudes. As much as there appears to be a complex cognitive evaluation process involved in blame, what makes the blame *be* blame is the blamer's attitude towards the blamed that they have morally failed. While certain beliefs about *why* that person has failed and *what* that means about them as an agent are typically involved in this (i.e.: there is always some criticism in blaming, as mentioned above), they are not primitive.

Here is a scenario. Mark, frustrated by his family cat's excessive meowing, adds a few drops of poison into Whiskers's Meow Mix, putting an end to the meowing, and Whiskers, once and for all. Let's assume that this is a bad act, fulfilling all the requirements a given normative ethics may have, such as intent and awareness. His wife, Alina, comes home to find her beloved Whiskers dead, and her wild-eyed husband with a vial of poison in one hand, proudly pumping his fist with the other. She *blames* him for killing the cat. Let's break this down.

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The first key is Alina's omnipresent empathetic relationship with Mark. Being closely spatiotemporally and causally related to him, she is generally able to easily convert *his* emotions, motivations, and other impressions into analogous impressions of her own. As such, when she becomes aware of Mark having killed the cat, she converts the experience that he went through—in the decision and execution of his act—into something she can compare with her own experiences. That is, she comes to understand his action, and all that lies behind it, as a potential action of hers, as one that she could have done had the world been very different than it is. This means not only asking oneself “what would it be like if I were to kill the cat?” but something closer to “what would it be like if I were Mark and I killed the cat?” Now, she is able to overcome Hume's claim that we can only morally evaluate another's actions by relating it to our own. “In sympathy there is an evident conversion of an idea [of another's passions] into an impression [of our own passions],” he writes, “this conversion arises from the relation of objects to ourself.”⁵⁵ She has related Mark's action to an action of her own, and with a sense that—if the world had turned out very different than it did, and she had been in Mark's position—killing an innocent cat would be a moral failure on her part, understands it as a moral failure on Mark's part. This sense is not calculated but emotional. A tinge of guilt, a pit in the stomach, a feeling of self-reproach—these are the things Alina feels in response to herself as potentially murdering Whiskers. This emotion is what generates the recognition that Mark's act is blameworthy.

Now, this all seems rather complex. On Scanlon's argument that an interpretation of blame “should be as faithful as possible to the phenomenology of blaming and to our judgements about when it is appropriate to blame,”⁵⁶ this is not so much an interpretation as a sort of fringe theory. Am I truly suggesting that when we see another person commit a bad act we should go through a multi-part process of empathetic conversions and self-understanding? Not necessarily. Of course there are occasions in which blame is much more straightforward. My interpretation is only that the final step of the process, the attitude, constitutes blame. That attitude, in a vacuum, comes to be connected to the actions of others through the above described process. In the real world, we are skilled enough at the nuances of interpersonal interaction that, like Hume's sympathy, the end can present itself without its constitutive means. But still, to define the end—

in this case a blame attitude—we must frame it in terms of its means—in this case a multi-part process of empathetic conversions and self-understanding. Just as we can walk into a somber room and suddenly feel glum without even thinking about it, all through the remarkable and complex quality of empathy, so too can we see a certain act and blame someone for it, as I’ve interpreted blame, without thinking too much about how we arrived at that judgement, by honing our abilities of empathy and self-reflection.

II.xi | Blame is Blamer-Dependent...But Not Because of Standing

The *standing-to-blame* argument, as it’s presented by Cohen, asserts that an act’s blameworthiness will stay static independent of anyone having the standing to actually blame them. That is to say, if I steal somebody’s wallet, a chronic thief would be unable to blame me, but that does not mean that my act has gotten any more or less worthy of blame, say if someone were to appear who *did* have the proper standing. Everything about the two potential cases of blame is the same, it’s only that one person isn’t “allowed” to. Being not “allowed” to blame can mean that the standards of interpersonal interaction prevents them from ever really performing the blame act. This is like R. Jay Wallace’s claim that I touched in Part I, that some violation of standing expels the violator from the social system of morality, removing their ability to blame. It can also mean that that their blame should simply be devalued. Nonetheless, the blame-relevant nature of the act itself stays the same. In my version, I maintain that blame is blamer-dependent; in no instance is the blamer superfluous, simply executing a task that anyone else could. But unlike *standing-to-blame* arguments, where blamer-dependence is tied to a blamer having the *right* to blame, this type of blamer-dependence is tied to a blamer having the *ability* to blame on a level more fundamental than even what Wallace suggests.

One good entry point to this other blamer-dependence is through a comparison with Scanlon’s relation-oriented blame. Scanlon writes of blame’s inseparability from the blamer’s relationship to the blamed: “as our distance from a person increases, blame becomes simply a negative evaluation, an attitude of disapproval.”⁵⁷ To him, this necessity of proximity is not due to gaining some *standing*, but is about the act’s relevance to the relationship between the blamer and blameworthy. One cannot blame a person who violates an intention or attitude that their mutual relationship never dictated in the first place. I cannot blame a

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stranger for refusing to pick me up at the airport the same way that I could blame a close friend. It's not only that I don't have the *right* to find them blameworthy—it's unfair and inappropriate—but I don't even have the *ability* to blame them, for that would involve my impairing my relationship with the stranger such that there's no longer an expectation that *I* will pick *them* up at the airport, an expectation that never existed.

Similar reasoning holds in my framework. What it means to blame someone is to feel that they've morally failed as an agent in the same way that you could potentially fail as an agent. To generate this feeling, there is a threshold of empathy that one must pass. We can follow Scanlon, replacing a traditional interpersonal relationship with an empathetic relationship. Just as I couldn't impair a relationship (i.e.: Scanlon-blame) by eliminating an expectation that the relationship wasn't tight enough to have had in the first place, I can't empathetically react to personal failure in another if I wasn't able to empathize strongly enough with that other in the first place. The difficulty, sometimes impossibility, of empathizing with someone who one is distantly related to directly translates to difficulty in blaming them. If we're viewing others more with the objective than subjective point of view, we'll be unable to generate a blame-relevant attitude, for we've failed to sufficiently relate the problematic act to ourselves.

If we engage in a kind of superficial empathy, merely a “well I wouldn't have done that”—completely disregarding that differential constitutive and circumstantial moral luck means that what it's like for one person to do something is essentially different from what it's like for another—then our resulting attitudes will be analogously superficial. In Part I, I claimed that a circumstance will not just give an agent the ability to make a choice, but will in part dictate choice that they make. Knowing this—the disorientation and surrealness of being faced with an extraordinary choice—is a key part of meaningfully empathizing. In my view, to feel that it would have been a failure for you to do as another has done, without emotionally accounting for the differences in perspectives between you two, is closer to a blame-irrelevant indulgence in imagination than a blame-relevant empathetic attitude. The difference in the reactive attitudes that the two result in is like the difference between the attitude that war is fun after playing *Call of Duty* and the attitude that war is profound horror after seeing *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Still, despite my indictment of superficial empathy, there is no “standing” to blame—no sense in which a blame act is unjustified. If one has

meaningfully empathized with another and reacted to them as having morally failed, then they've blamed, whoever they are. If they have not done that, then they have not blamed, whoever they are.

A ramification of this is that an act will be strongly dynamically blameworthy. This opposes not only Cohen, but Scanlon as well, who argues that an act may be blameworthy based on who it's done to, but insofar as the relationship context is established, the act is either blameworthy or it's not. Someone can choose whether they follow through and blame a friend, by reciprocating an impairment to their friendship, but they can't deny when a friend has impaired it in the first place, and is thus blameworthy. That fact of the matter is so removed from the resulting attitudes of the actors involved that "a judgement of blameworthiness is one that anyone can make, however distant he or she may be from the relevant agent and action."⁵⁸ I can look at two strangers and, so long as I know the intentions and attitudes of their relationship, I can determine when one is blameworthy. In fact, this even opposes fully reactive attitude-based proposals like that of Strawson. While it may appear that Strawson held blameworthiness as dependent on being blamed, which in turn depended on the blamer's attitudes, suggesting that blameworthiness itself was at the mercy of the blamer, this is offset by his claim of a standard of appropriateness of reactive attitudes. Blameworthiness, to him, is not being the target of certain reactive attitudes, but is rather being the *appropriate* target of certain reactive attitudes. This appropriateness remains static, like Hume's general point of view. The upshot of all of these views is that there's always room for one to incorrectly blame someone who isn't deserving, for the act of blaming doesn't perfectly align with the description of being blameworthy.

What I mean by my view being strongly dynamically blameworthy is that these do perfectly align; the *blameworthiness* of an act varies from person to person based on their ability to generate the right kind of attitudes. If person A meaningfully empathizes with person B and forms the attitude that they have morally failed, person B is blameworthy *to person A*. That is, their attitude of blaming justifies a belief that the blamed is deserving of that attitude. If person C meaningfully empathizes with person B and does not form that attitude that they have morally failed, person B is blameless *to person C* for the same act. If person D cannot meaningfully empathize with person B, because they're too distantly related or due to some inability on person D's part, then a judgement of blameworthiness is simply not intelligible for them. In the same way

that two individuals have different standards on personal failures, they will have different standards on what constitutes a personal failure in another, even if they interpret the act in the same way. I cannot look at two strangers and determine when one is deserving of blame by the other, as I don't know the potential blamer's personal moral standards.

The relativism of this will surely be unsavory to many. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that blameworthiness relativism is not *moral* relativism. I am making a proposal about a very specific interpersonal gesture and belief that results from that gesture. If we assert blame as foremost interpersonal and not political, which might require some consistent standard from which to derive hegemonic declarations, then I see no major problem with every aspect of it being deeply particular.

II.xii | *No Need for Consequences*

My joining of blaming together with blameworthiness calls for comment on what is often thought of as separating the two—that is: consequence. Many believe that blameworthiness is a latent fact of the matter which becomes *blame* when that latency is acted upon, leading to a consequence.

In terms of the moral ledger view, take Zimmerman's assertion of responsibility "*tout court*,"⁵⁹ which is similar to *type-of-person* arguments shown in Part I, that one is responsible independent of their actual actions in virtue of what they counterfactually *would have* done. Considering the essential impossibility of always knowing when one is responsible *tout court*, there is a necessary split between the fact of one having a negative mark on their moral ledger and us judging that they have said negative mark. This judgement can be seen as simultaneously evaluative and consequential, according to Pamela Hieronymi, as "a judgment of ill will can carry a certain amount of force—despite being descriptive. [...] A change in what you or another person thinks about the quality of your will, in itself, changes your relations with them."⁶⁰ Thus, the practical difference between one who's blameworthy, say, in a *tout court* fashion which never gets recognized, and one who's blamed, is that the blame act features a consequence: that of a changed relationship between the blamed and blamer.

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In terms of reactive attitudes, one consequence that distinguishes being blamed from merely being blameworthy is that one who's blamed is faced with the relevant attitudes of another. Having to face another's resentment or indignation is itself a kind of penalty. But as Gary Watson notes, this is a relatively weak sanction. "To most of us, it is disagreeable [...] to be disapproved of. But how far will this take us? It is disagreeable only when the disapproval is felt."⁶¹ Moreover, does this mean that there's *no* sanction involved with the blaming of those who aren't around to see it, such as those who've died? Instead, he argues, "blaming attitudes involve a readiness to adverse treatment," such as "to receive fewer of the benefits of human society."⁶² Reactive attitude conceptions of blame such as this one thus posit a consequence to blame in the form of a sort of vigilance or "readiness" towards punishment on the part of the blamer.

Scanlon's position is where it's easiest to see how consequences distinguish blameworthiness from blame. In fact, the consequence of a reciprocated relationship impairment is the very thing which constitutes blame. While we'd assume certain emotions, judgements, or beliefs are associated with the impairment, but the resulting impairment itself is both necessary and sufficient for blame. A case of mere blameworthiness is impotent; from the perspective of the potential blamer, the relationship is exactly the same before and after the blameworthy act. A case of blame, on the other hand, leads to a different relationship after the blame as compared to before.

On this train of thought, my joining of blame with blameworthiness is something like a claim that that latent fact of blameworthiness is *always* actualized, which seems similar to saying "any time someone does something blameworthy as a matter of fact, there is some consequence necessarily engendered by the blamer." That appears confusing, if not outright unbelievable. If I am cruel to a friend—the type of thing that would appropriately lead to a negative mark on my moral ledger, a blame-relevant reactive attitude, or an impairment to our relationship—then there is somehow a *necessary* consequence? Even if my friend doesn't choose to actually alter their opinion of me, have a blame-relevant reactive attitude, or reciprocate the impairment? Where does the consequence occur? It is reasonable to think that the very unbelievability of this claim is *why* many have separated blame from blameworthiness. There has to be an allowance for occasions where someone does something blameworthy but does not face a consequence for it.

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That interpretation, though, is one which aligns blame with blameworthiness by retrofitting blame. As in, assuming blameworthiness is appropriate in nearly every instance of a bad act, then expanding blame to occur whenever blameworthiness is present. My version of blame runs the other direction. The blame attitude is primitive, and I am claiming that something is only blameworthy insofar as blame has occurred. It is more that blameworthiness shrinks to fit occasions of blame than the inverse. If I am cruel to a friend and they do not empathetically react to it as a personal moral failure on my part, not only have they not blamed me, but I am not blameworthy (to them).

Therefore, I can hold onto the joining of blame with blameworthiness without an implausible claim that all blameworthy acts face consequences. Further, since there need not be anything *more* that blame does to differentiate itself from blameworthiness, as other proposals require the addition of some consequence like reciprocated impairment for the differentiation, I am comfortable leaving blame consequenceless. The relevant reactive attitude that another has morally failed is sufficient for blame. Again, I am reducing the consequence requirements of blame to those of blameworthiness (i.e.: only contingent), not raising the blame requirements of blameworthiness to those of blame (i.e.: necessary). Now, similarly to criticism—which only *requires* a certain belief of violating normative standards, but almost always is accompanied by certain desires and emotions—blame is almost always accompanied by some consequence, if only something like Watson’s “readiness to adverse treatment.” I’m only saying that it doesn’t need such a consequence. In sum, where most proposals have many actions being blameworthy and a subset of those resulting in blame, often as defined by some blame-consequence, my interpretation holds that the only actions that are blameworthy are those that are blamed, and that neither requires a consequence beyond the blame-relevant reactive attitude.

Because I maintain that consequences, while not necessary, are common to blame, we might ask why or when someone might choose not to induce them. One of the reasons is my interpretation’s focus on interpersonal interaction over moral principles. Inasmuch as other proposals see blame as instrumental to enforcing a moral system of permissible and impermissible, inconsequential blame is failed blame, for it reinforces that moral system as weakly as no blame at all. My interpretation of blame doesn’t call for it to have this reinforcing duty. For the role of punitive consequence in my interpretation, it is smarter to again

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look towards Scanlon's view, which sees relational factors preceding the act in question as having a lot to say about whether to follow through with consequences, and makes an allowance for a reasonable person to knowingly let one off the hook for something ostensibly blameworthy.

"There are also cases in which our relations with agents count against blaming them,"⁶³ Scanlon writes. To him, certain kinds of relationships, such as that between a parent and a child, require or at least facilitate a level of forgiveness so as to discourage reciprocating a relational impairment. Of course this does not mean that a parent can never blame their child if the act is egregious enough, and Scanlon clarifies that one can impair a relationship by, say, lowering the amount of trust placed in another without a more tangible manifestation, but the point holds that consequential blame is not always the rational move. A key basis for this is that "the conditions in virtue of which relationships exist, and the relevant normative standards therefore apply, do not always involve the parties' attitudes toward one another."⁶⁴ That is to say, if the only thing which binds two people together in a relationship is their attitudes towards each other, then the fact that one has violated those attitudes gives the other no reason not to reciprocate. However, because various other things, such as proximity, loneliness, or the fact that one is the other's child, can serve as the reason for maintaining a relationship, there are motivations which might push against this reciprocation.

I believe Scanlon is on the right path here. It is rather obvious that decisions over whether to invoke certain punitive measures—such as physical retribution or publicization of the transgression—are complex, and it is overly harsh to believe they should be a necessary part of evaluating another as having morally failed. At the core of blame, in the Strawsonian vein, is not what penalty the blamed deserves, but the relationship between the blamer and the blamed. That is why the idea of impairing that relationship is the most viable candidate for a necessary consequence of blame. Even if these relationships are empathetic rather than literal, we can imagine an impairment being like "I used to be invested in your wellbeing from afar, but now I am not."

However, I too wholeheartedly agree with Scanlon's skepticism about motivations for relationships to commit in that direction. It wouldn't be unusual to agree with him that certain motivations of a relationship are not exclusively attitude-based, but that alternative motivations should be thought of as

exceptions. Typically, on this view, we should assume relationships generate out of attitudes. I don't support this assumption. There is a certain value in being close with another person and there is a certain value in being attracted to the attitudes of that person, and they don't always go hand-in-hand. If someone's relationship with another is motivated by, say, loneliness, intrigue, or sheer proximity, which I believe they are more than many would be willing to admit, there will be much less pushing them to impair that relationship. Blame is a recognition of a moral fault, a fault which—in virtue of the process being empathy-based—the blamer understands themselves as having or potentially having. Only to the extent that the relationship is built on a kind of moral synergy would the blamer be motivated by that recognition to impair it.

All in all, my interpretation of blaming holds it as an incredibly introspective and nuanced action. Because of these nuances, namely its relativism, most standard punitive measures are inappropriate to indiscriminately attach to it. Relationship impairments are a common consequence but, because motivations for relationships and motivations for blaming are often not one-in-the-same, I'm unwilling to inextricably attach that either. What I'm left with for blame is—similar to how I described criticism—something 'raw' and cautious. Again, it is a starting point in a certain kind of negative moral evaluation, not an ending point. We blame *and then* we figure out how much stock to put in that blame, and how to further empower it via consequence.

II.xiii | The Role of Avoidability

A central theme of discussions of blame and responsibility is that of avoidability.‡ Due to the proximity of this argument to those of free will and determinism, I'm reluctant to dive too deeply into that

‡ Recent discussion on this matter has largely been colored by “Frankfurt-type situations”⁶⁵ which update Locke's “bolted room” thought experiment. Frankfurt's point is that Locke's character is morally responsible for staying in the room because he's done it by choice, even if, unbeknownst to him, it is bolted from the outside, and he has no choice *but* to do so. While Frankfurt-type situations are valuable scenarios to consider, Derk Pereboom has devised an attractive refutation of the problem they seem to present, which in turn has been responded to by Ishtiyaque Haji and Eleanor Stump.⁶⁶

I believe that this discussion often falls victim to losing the forest through for trees, and leads to positions increasingly inapplicable to real life. For the present discussion, it is most helpful to investigate Frankfurt-type situations interpreted liberally. That is, as an entry point into the role of coercion and one's environment when understanding circumstantial moral luck. In the Nagel example presented in Part I, both the German *and* the Canadian, in fact, have the

matter, and will only stick my feet in long enough to describe why avoidability is *not* necessary to either my interpretations of blame or criticism,

I already mentioned that criticism is merely a belief about how an actor relates to a certain normative rule. If they've violated that rule, the agent is criticizable. If I am required to throw litter into the ocean under the threat of execution, assuming littering violates my normative standards, then I am to be criticized for that act. Is this fair? Absolutely! It might be unfair if I'm charged a hefty fine for my littering, for that implies that every bad act I do is punishable, something I've already refuted. Yet as critics we should not be out for blood, but out for well-reasoned conclusions. We don't reach well-reasoned conclusions by trying to apply rigid rules about who deserves what when, but rather by invoking clear and rigid *standards* for what exactly occurs, then applying those standards dynamically and intelligently. The rigidity of our standard of criticizability lies, in part, in its independence of the control of the criticized.

As for blame, avoidability isn't necessary, but it is certainly impactful. If we envision ourselves being forced to litter at gunpoint, we're unlikely to react with a sense of self-resentment or any other attitude that would lead to blame. Still, I don't believe it implausible that one can generate attitudes of disapproval and self-reproach even as a result of an action that is unavoidable. Situations like these, where we believe we've exhibited a moral failing while understanding that we had no alternative, can be hard to distinguish from the paradigmatic criticism cases where "I can't blame myself too much, but I just wish things had turned out differently than they did," but that doesn't mean they don't exist. They are especially conceivable in Frankfurt cases, where the fact that I was going to do what I did no matter what does little to take away from my finding it to be a moral failing, considering that I did it on my own volition. Since we can envision instances

opportunity to become a Nazi. It is only that the German does not have the option *not* to. Assuming he acted because he supported the cause and not out of fear of punishment, the German is something like Frankfurt's "Jones" or Locke's bolted-in man—doing exactly what he chooses to but unable to do otherwise.

Moreover, the supposition that, whether done by choice or via invocation of the intervener, there will be no discernable difference in the Frankfurt actor's action is unrealistic. In Frankfurt's example, the potential intervener is unknown to the actor. In analogous situations in the real world, one knows when they're being coerced in such a fashion. Frankfurt says that "Black" has no choice but to do what "Jones" wants, but when this situation is presented in a more realistic fashion, he does. He can force "Jones" to intervene or not. We evaluate differently the person who does the villain's bidding only after being asked as compared to after they've been threatened with a gun as compared to after they've actually taken a bullet to the foot.

where one has an attitude of moral failure towards themselves for something unavoidable, we should be able to envision that one could empathetically generate that attitude towards another, resulting in blame.

II.xiv | The Standing to Criticize

At this point, I've discussed how my conception of blame is blamer-dependent. To reiterate, anyone that has the *ability* to blame has the *right* to blame—there is no privilege of standing. Yet not everyone has the ability to blame, as they may not be able to form a sufficient empathetic connection. I see this type of empathy as central to viewing another with an adequately subjective point of view. Because criticism follows from the objective point of view, there is no analogous limitation of ability. Except for perhaps the most dogmatic proponents of libertarian free will, everyone has the capacity to understand others as objects of their environment. To that point, one may wonder if *standing-to-blame* arguments, which simply didn't seem like the right kind of thing to apply to blame, might apply to criticism. If someone consistently violates normative standards, do they have the right to criticize another?

I find that *standing-to-criticism* arguments, while being sensible in a way that *standing-to-blame* arguments are not, are misguided. I wholeheartedly endorse the position Macalester Bell takes in *The Standing to Blame: A Critique*, that the components of *standing*, while an interesting part of analyzing a paradigm, are “utterly beside the point”⁶⁷ when it comes to allowing one to blame, and the same goes for criticism.

First, we must ask what the purpose of criticism is. As I hope is clear by now, I interpret criticism relatively cautiously, as neither prescriptive nor condemnatory. It does not imply an accompanying punishment or anything about the criticized as an agent, except that they've been involved in a certain event which can be assessed in terms of a normative critical framework. On the other hand, if you are seeking punishment or a strong condemnation, it's likely a good idea to have some criticisms lined up. It's difficult, though not impossible, to argue for punitive measures or that someone else is a bad person without any belief that they've violated normative standards. Envision a consequentialist utilitarian calling for the punishment of someone else without any accompanying belief that they've lowered the utility in the world. In the most colloquial terms, we might say that the purpose of criticism is merely to ‘point something out.’ It's to say

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something like “as much as you justify your actions internally, as much as you understand yourself subjectively as a free agent, there are certain facts of the matter regarding your relationship to normative standards and the world at-large which you should know.”

What about this purpose is undermined when done by someone who doesn’t have the proper standing? It’s not clear. Looking back at the bases for *standing-to-blame* arguments mentioned in Part I, one might say that a hypocrite can’t criticize because they don’t really understand that a given act is criticizable, considering they do it themselves. The removal of the condition of control in criticism renders this argument inapplicable. If I’ve littered under the threat of execution, I somehow don’t understand that littering violates a normative standard, and as a result can’t criticize you for doing the same? Even beyond this, we can follow Bell on the point that “while past wrongdoing may compromise a person’s moral vision, it may also improve it. Wrongdoers often have knowledge of the costs of wrongdoing that others lack.”⁶⁸ Considering criticism is the formation of a certain belief, it is reasonable to think that those best able to form the belief are those most familiar with the believed proposition’s subject. I know the most about the things I have direct experience with. More intimate knowledge can lead to a better ability to form relevant beliefs.

The other key *standing-to-blame* avenue I looked at was that a lack of standing exits one from a moral community presupposing equality that they must be a part of in order to blame. There is a violation of this equality—on the one hand I am harshly scrutinizing you, on the other hand I am not scrutinizing myself. My initial answer is that, when it comes to understanding our relationship with a given normative critical standard, and how we may live up to or fall short of it, *of course* it is unequal. It is infeasible to view one’s self with the same type of objectivity as one can see others. We are able to see ourselves with *enough* of an objective point of view to self-criticize, but the fact that there are times when the objective point of view is far clearer focused on others than ourselves shouldn’t count as a point against us.

More, to again invoke Bell, “we should distinguish between three different kinds of hypocrisy.”⁶⁹ Some do what they criticize others for out of weakness of will, in which case their moral knowledge is completely unsullied, and they should be allowed to criticize. Some do acts then out of convention criticize others for those same acts, but don’t actually believe them criticizable, in which case they wouldn’t actually be

criticizing at all. They may look like they're criticizing, but since they don't form the belief that the act has violated a relevant norm, they're not. Finally, some believe certain acts criticizable when others do them but not when they themselves do them. Such a person's criticisms should, admittedly, be viewed with a grain of salt. But in reference to the aforementioned purposes of criticism, there is no reason to believe that they shouldn't be allowed to make them.

II.xv | The Role of Reasons

Susan Wolf has recently embarked on a project similar to this one, that is, a careful distinguishing of blame from criticism as understood through Strawson's objective and subjective points of view. She, too, does not so much fight as interpret the idea of such evaluations being predicated on the appropriateness of reactive attitudes. Wolf rejects my mapping of blame and criticism onto subjective and objective points of view, respectively, instead holding that both invoke the subjective point of view, differing in the way they see the subject's relation to the bad act or feature. The basis for an agent being criticizable "has less to do with the individual's control over what he is or does than of the kinds of reasons for being or to acting differently to which he is susceptible."⁷⁰ If the agent is receptive to reasons for why they would not do a bad act or have a bad feature, then it is appropriate to criticize them for it. Blame, on the other hand, involves both this responsiveness to reasons and an ability to do otherwise, or control.

Her example is of an aged sexist, who, due to his upbringing, may have had little control in developing his discriminatory attitudes. Yet still, he understands concepts like equality and oppression and has at least the capacity to understand how sexism may be bad. "The salient feature," she writes, "that makes one's friend subject to criticism is not that it is up to him to be a sexist or not to be; rather, it is that there are reasons not to be a sexist that he has the capacity to appreciate that he is failing to recognize."⁷¹ His lack of control does succeed in halting us from blaming him, however.

How do these conditions, having reasons to avoid doing bad and being able to follow through on that avoidance, fit into my picture? Having or not having a reason to avoid a bad act is far more relevant to my notion of blame than of criticism. A good rationale for performing a bad act can lend support to a

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justification of that act, but doesn't relieve it from being bad, and thus criticizable. As mentioned earlier, criticism is a type of 'raw data' of negative moral evaluation; it is something we should do first when trying to make an assessment from the objective point of view, deciding how much stock we should really place in it afterwards. Within the appreciation of someone's reasons for doing or avoiding a bad act is the appreciation that it *is* a bad act, and if a key component to 'taking a step back' and looking at things from an objective perspective is separating the various parts of what's being looked into its constituents, we would be smart to leave a well-defined space for that latter appreciation.

Blame, as I see it, does have a role for the blamed's responsiveness to reasons. It is not as binary as Wolf sees it—hinging on the dichotomy of having or not having reasons—but to the extent that we consider our reasons for doing or being something or some way when self-reflecting, we would make the same considerations when empathizing with another. The line here is difficult to draw, as it separates having reasons to avoid an act or feature from that act or feature being bad. It may be thought that *any* time an act or feature is bad, and thus criticizable, we have a reason not to do it, which will play into our blame. My picture allows for this to happen without a conflation of criticism and blame, for having reasons for avoidance is only one thing we consider when empathetically evaluating another, not the only thing. And so there can be cases where one has a reason to not do an act in virtue of it being criticizable but we still do not blame them, for that reason was overridden by other justificatory factors in the same way that a certain reason to avoid an act can be overridden when we're considering self-reproach for doing it. We can imagine other reasons for avoidance beyond something's moral goodness or badness. Perhaps, like Jean Valjean, a reason for one's doing a bad act is the desperation of their family. This, almost certainly, would influence our empathetic attitude towards the act as compared to towards the average bread-thief. We would be far less likely to react to it as reminiscent of what we consider our own moral failures, and thus less likely to blame for it.

To circle back to Wolf's exact focus—one's *capacity* to respond to reasons not to do a bad act—we must overcome a hurdle, which is that one who is completely unresponsive to common moral reasons (she envisions a crocodile indifferent to human suffering) might be rather difficult to empathize with at all, leaving blame off the table. If we *are* able to empathize with them though, it is clear to see the effect their lack of this

capacity could have. The type of badness that occurs when one does evil without a reason not to, not even the reason that it is evil, because they are unable to appreciate such a reason, is not the type of badness that we would necessarily consider a personal, moral failure in ourselves, and thus we might not react to it with a blame-relevant attitude.

Of course, while the inability to respond to reasons may stave off blame, there is room for one to be blameworthy *because* they fail to respond to reasons to avoid a bad act. This borders on Randolph Clarke's proposal that an agent should be blamed for not doing something if "she is free in failing to doing the thing in question and if her lack of awareness of her obligation to do it (or her lacking the belief that she ought to do it)—and of the fact that she isn't doing it—falls below a cognitive standard that applies to her, given her cognitive and volitional abilities and the situation she is in."⁷² In other words, if we do something bad not out of malice, but ignorance, forgetfulness, or some other cognitive blunder, we can still be blamed for it. This holds for my version of blame. Just as we would consider it a personal failure if we did something bad because we were simply ignorant that we had reasons not to do it, not out of active malice, we would be prone to blame another on the same grounds. Nuance maintains, however, as certain cognitive blunders, even those that don't result from a lack of a capacity reason-response, *may* be invoked to eschew blame. There are times when we do wrong out of forgetfulness or foolishness and, even holding that such ineptitude falls below our cognitive standard, don't believe it represents a morally relevant failure in us as an individual.

A way in which my criticism may fail to satisfy someone like Wolf is in its coldness. The reason for her denial of criticism as springing from the objective point of view is that criticism "is not dispassionate, and it is in tension with the objective attitude with which paradigmatically nonresponsible beings must be regarded."⁷³ In fact, to her, "it seems plausible to think that regarding someone as an appropriate object of criticism presupposes the individual's being a responsible agent just as much as does regarding him as an appropriate object of blame."⁷⁴ She coins the "just sayin model"⁷⁵ as a version of criticism similar to mine, and faults it for not leaving room for affect.

There is a certain foundational disagreement between us, namely of the special nature, or lack thereof, of criticizing humans compared to other objects. Some of this may be allayed by my disregarding of a

‘pure’ criticism, and assertion of the presence of some blame every time it appears. Yes, I see no key difference between criticizing a human versus another object, but every time we criticize a human, there is a unique aspect to the evaluation: the blaming. Never are we truly judging people so dispassionately on my view. I am merely separating out the less passionate component. Moreover, depending on one’s normative critical framework, they may be prevented from criticizing anybody but reason-responsive humans. Still, though, there lingers a trouble: Thomas Nagel’s claim of the incompatibility between agency and the notion of “actions being events, or people being things”⁷⁶ that results from the “just sayin” model. One question is whether we are capable of viewing people and actions in such a detached manner, even if combined with something a little more warm-blooded like blame. To this I’m inclined to say we can, not perfectly, as I’ve said, but to a great enough extent as to allow for a distinction between blame and criticism as I’ve described them. Another question is whether allowing for this form of criticism has nihilistic existential implications. An answer to that may require a whole other thesis, so for now I will leave the question open, holding that no answer would invalidate my conception of criticism. Finding that criticism rooted in the objective point of view leads to a valueless notion of life as of mere things and events would be distasteful, considering that it is the only negative moral evaluation strongly available to us when we’re evaluating distantly related agents, but such distastefulness is not enough to reject the framework as a whole.

II.xvi | Loss of Obligation

Earlier in this section, I commended the positions of Hume, Scanlon, and Strawson for, to varying degrees, forgoing “a reliance on imperative or obligation when making moral judgements, instead looking towards the specific statuses of the involved parties and their attitudes towards each other, both before and after the act in question.” This forgoing cannot be glossed over, as it’s at odds with the majority of historical thought on blame. “In addition to a freedom (or control) requirement,” Haji states, “responsibility also has what we may call a ‘deontic requirement’ (or a ‘moral requirement’). [...] this requirement concerns suitable connections between praiseworthiness and obligation or permissibility, on the one hand, and blame and impermissibility, on the other.”⁷⁷ Typically, it is thought that for an act to be blameworthy it must be wrong

in the sense that it is either impermissible or otherwise at odds with some ethical obligation. My interpretation of blame denies this.

It may be assumed that in most cases where one is empathetically reacting to another as having morally failed, they are invoking in some capacity their sense of obligation. There is nothing that induces a feeling of moral self-reproach quicker than the realization that we've violated an ethical duty. At the same time, there are still other things which induce such a feeling. Our understanding of ourselves as moral agents is far more complex than feeling that we've failed as such *only* when we've violated an explicit obligation. This is all the more true if, as I believe, morality extends beyond traditional conceptions of 'right' and 'wrong' into other forms of value, those which Bernard Williams would call "ethical."⁷⁸ A step further, there is no reason that one cannot blame without a solid foundation of 'rights' and 'wrongs' at all. Being a moral agent is different than being, say, a basketball player, where assessment of self and others is wholly dependent on the goals and rules of the game. The goal of being a moral agent is to somehow live a good, valuable life—I simply don't see this as being the right *type* of thing to form attitudes on in terms of abstracted imperatives.

The basis for this, and perhaps a much stronger thread through this entire proposal than I've thus far posited, is the balancing of interpersonal with a kind of moral honesty—that which various traditions refer to as "good faith" or "authenticity." This honesty maintains our essential shortcomings when it comes to knowing moral truths. If, as many hold it, blame serves to reinforce a moral system which is our guide to living a good and valuable life, we cannot be too cautious holding off on blame in the absence of a confident connection between our moral system and that good and valuable life. As I find this absence inescapable, we are left seemingly eternally holding off on blame. That is something like Jean-Paul Sartre's understanding of good faith, whereby our only deeply true options for judgement of a choice pertain to that choice's relation to logic and freedom. But such an understanding is inadequate in the face of Strawsonian claims that blame is not optional; as Wertheimer says, "abstaining from all value judgement is not a live option."⁷⁹ Thus, I've been led to sever the other tie, that between blame's role in reinforcing a moral system, that is, a system of obligations.

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Now, it is fair to ask whether this is truly an interpretation of blame without obligations so much as it's an interpretation of blame without universal obligations. One can accept the strongly dynamic nature of my proposal for blameworthiness, interpreting it as meaning that when one is blameworthy to person A but not person B, that they've violated the moral obligations of person A but not of person B. In other words, person A has meaningfully empathized with the act and understood it as a moral failure in virtue of it violating a moral duty person A believes the perpetrator has. I suppose this is a viable interpretation for those who are hell-bent on retaining some role for deontic judgements, but I don't believe it necessary. An attitude of moral failure towards one's self need not include a belief that one has violated either a universal or a personal ethical duty, it can simply be a conative, and therefore slightly mysterious, reaction.

When criticizing, obligations are on the table, but are still not needed. Unlike blame, where the blamer *feels* that the blamed *is* something, in criticism the criticizer *believes* that the criticized *has done* something. This *thing* they supposedly *have done* could potentially be violating an obligation. However, in such a case, we must be careful that our duty-oriented critical framework can be reconciled with the Strawsonian objective point of view. Many judgements based on obligations, while cognitive, still view the judged as a free agent, with mainly the subjective point of view. "To be morally obligated to do something," writes Zimmerman, "one must have deliberate control over doing it; if one cannot do it intentionally, then one cannot be morally obligated to do it in the first place."⁸⁰ At the least, the Kantian claim that *ought* implies *can* is typically held onto, suggesting one cannot be obligated to do something they can't do. Both of these caveats, control and ability, can be applied in criticism coming from the objective point of view, but it's far trickier to do so than when working with, say, a consequentialist critical framework, where the criticized is simply any object that has done something resulting in a worsened world. Taking into account something like intentionality often pushes us more towards the subjective point of view than criticism would allow.

Thus, a key result of my interpretation is the elimination of any need for obligation or moral imperative when blaming and criticizing. An overly pithy but potentially helpful way of seeing my motivation for this is a kind of 'go big or go home' attitude towards invoking the objective and subjective points of view. If you're going to be assessing someone with the subjective point of view, you must be willing to go all in on

its being an interaction between two agents, rather than trying to relate it to some external framework. This necessarily leads to blame relativism, but only does so in the service of staying faithful to the agency of the individuals involved in the blaming. If you're going to be assessing someone with the objective point of view, you must be willing to go all in on that front. No more relating individuals to external frameworks while seeking to maintain some conception of actually assessing *them*. No, if we're contextualizing individuals into a greater system—whether it be a system of obligation or a system of changing states of the world—we should understand them as objects of this context. It is when we clearly separate these two points of view that we will best be able to adjudicate them and reach satisfactory judgements.

II.xvii | Regarding an Earlier Question

At the beginning of this section I posed three questions. How my proposal fits into two of them—“what are the different types of moral judgments?” and “what are we doing when we blame?”—have already been adequately addressed. The second question—“what do we base responsibility on?”—I leave generally open. That is by design. As was noted by Andre and Strawson before her, it is this exact kind of consideration that leads to over-intellectualized conundrums. I do not disqualify such considerations from being relevant; for instance, ones invocation of an “Aristotelian” or “Kantian” paradigm of responsibility, as Andre defines them, may influence how they view their own moral failures, and how they therefore blame others. The point is rather that blame should be impervious from the destruction of a given such paradigm. If a hardcore Kantian were to turn atheist, suddenly holding that thinking of morality in terms of punishment and reward from a higher power is absurd, that would not make blame unintelligible. Most any paradigm of moral responsibility would allow for at least the potential of an individual seeing moral failure in themselves and empathetically relating it to the actions and features of others. The part of the question which I do *not* leave open is which direction blame looks. Blame on my picture is decidedly backward-looking.

II.xviii | How This Resolves the Problem of Circumstantial Moral Luck

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At this point, it is time to complete the circle and show how this interpretation of moral assessment solves the dilemmas that motivated its creation. To recap Part I: it is common to argue that we should only blame others for what is in their control. Something that is often out of individuals' control are the moral choices that arise out of their particular circumstances, which they would have been able to avoid had they been at some other spatiotemporal location. Yet, we are still inclined to blame people for their actions when faced with these moral choices; in fact, it seems that they might be the *only* thing we can blame people for. If we know what everybody *would have* done in any given circumstance, perhaps through a careful assessment of their moral character in daily life, we wouldn't have to worry about good and bad luck in actual circumstances, for our assessments would draw off our knowledge of counterfactuals. However, we can't know this. First, because confusion over what character means and how it should be assessed makes such assessments implausibly onerous. Second, because I argue that many circumstances are impossible to accurately simulate through reference to other, very different circumstances, even when both seem to be invoking the same source of "moral character." The ability to predict these counterfactuals goes beyond careful detective work into the realm of fantastical superpower, and is completely useless to us when we try to figure out how to blame as epistemically limited humans in real-world scenarios, which is the only worthy way of understanding blame. We reach a point where it starts to seem like the *only* people who have the authority to blame are those who've made the morally right choice when faced with exact test they're blaming another for having failed.

Let's now look at my interpretation of blame; how does it reconcile these difficult problems? First, we can look to Nagel's comparison discussed in Part I, of a German man who joins the Nazi party and a Canadian who is never given the option. How *blameworthy* are these two men? To the average contemporary perspective, it's likely that *neither* are particularly blameworthy. For the majority of people, the actions of anyone that occurred 90 years ago will be incredibly difficult to meaningfully empathize with. The differences in circumstances unrelated to the choice of whether to become a Nazi—in social dynamics, interaction with technology, conceptions of community and the individual, what have you—alone put these men a far enough distance away from us that we'll have very little sense of what it was like to be them. Add in, for the German,

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the pressures that the choice of whether to become a Nazi or not provide, which, as I've said, can actually alter how you go about making the pertinent decision, and a vast majority of the subjective point of view is simply off the table for our assessment. Increasingly, any sort of claim about how *you* would have reacted to the situation looks a lot like the superficial empathy that I discarded earlier as irrelevant. We'd all like to think that we'd be flooded with attitudes of agent-regret and self-reproach if we were to start working on behalf of the Nazis, but it's unlikely that we'll be able to feel these attitudes considering our current bank of experiences.

It should be rather obvious, but these roadblocks in blaming *do not* apply to criticism. Barring some obscure critical code wherein whatever contribution our German made to the Holocaust and World War II did not violate a normative standard, it is safe to say that he is to be criticized to an extreme degree. In fact, however much my blame may appear to go too softly on him, it is at least partially recovered by the unforgiving nature of the criticism, which pays no mind to the coercion he may have felt when making the choice. Remember, as well, that criticism is not emotionless. It is completely reasonable in this picture to feel anger and disgust, among a large palette of other attitudes, towards our Nazi. The only attitudes which are out of bounds are those which project onto him a poisoned his moral agency. We savagely and powerfully assert his status as one who has worked counter to a morally good universe, where things would have been more moral had he simply never been born, but we are blocked from assertions about who he is an agent.

Perhaps now it appears that we're back to where we ended up at the end of Part I; if, for something as heinous as joining the Nazi party, blame is reserved for only those who have sufficient experience with what it might be like to be living under a Fascist dictatorship in 1930s Europe, then we've made no progress at all! My first response to this objection is that it continues to underestimate criticism. Under the often implicitly held view that criticism is little more than a reduced version of blame, we find it deeply unsettling to be unable to blame those who've done truly horrid things, as it feels like the weaker accusation. The truth of the matter, though, is that while criticism may not be able to reach some of the emotional depths that blame can, as it doesn't pick at the more tender scab of interpersonal empathy, it is not weaker. For example, think of criticism under a consequentialist critical framework, where it acts as an accusation of the criticized's

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contribution to a worse world. One might say that this criticism is actually harsher than blame, which is complicated by the fact that it relies so closely on the blamer's view of themselves and how they relate to the blamed. I think we'd all agree that when self-reflection and subjecthood enter the equation, things get quite a bit messier, and while this messiness can make sentiments more intensely felt, it has the potential to also make them have less integrity and coherence.

My second response is that, while in this case the ability to empathize aligned with lack of experience—as in, our lack of ability to empathize stemmed from the fact that we didn't face the exact situation that the German faced—this isn't always, and in fact, is often not, the case. Remember, denying circumstantial moral luck implied that notions of moral responsibility were only intelligible in the context of two individuals who were in the exact same circumstance. A majority of blame-relevant situations, however, offer space for us to empathize even if we haven't experienced *exactly* that situation before. True, there are circumstances—which are either extreme or spatiotemporally distant—where practically nothing in our lives could offer insight into what it was like to be there. But in many cases, for many people, we are afforded this insight. Look at the earlier example of Alina and her cat-murdering husband Mark. Alina has never murdered Whiskers, nor has she been in the type of headspace where she wanted to murder Whiskers (a saintliness foreign to most cat-owners). Yet still, she likely has had enough experience—with interpersonal interactions, with feelings of annoyance, with desires to inflict harm, and otherwise—to sufficiently know what it would be like to be Mark and murder the cat. And this is a rather extreme example. Consider all of those cases in which others do things far less unfamiliar to us than killing. Making an inappropriate joke, failing to support a family member, lying to a friend; these are all actions that are ripe for blame-relevant assessments and attitudes. We don't need to have been in *that* situation to judge another's reaction to it, only to have been in enough similar ones to truly view them with the subjective point of view.

So, there is an orthodox way in which this interpretation of blame “resolves” the issue: it allows for blame to occur in many situations which a wholesale denial of circumstantial moral luck would prevent. Nonetheless, it does not recover blame to the extent many would hope. There are still many cases where, intuitively, blame feels appropriate, yet my picture only allows for criticism. That dissonance is offset by the

second way in which this interpretation succeeds. It rejects the notion of blame as the most worthy and powerful negative moral evaluation. There is undoubtedly a special importance attached to blame in virtue of its connection to close, empathizable relationships. In my mind, this connection means that a world without criticism is far preferable to a world without blame. Still, the gravity of criticism is nothing to sneeze at. I'm willing to argue that it is not *blame* necessarily that many feel is appropriate in the cases, but rather *some strong condemnation*. So long as criticism can be strong and emotional, we should allow for it to be a functional substitute.

II.xix | *A World with Less Blaming*

A component of this view that I believe demands special emphasis is that it significantly reduces the amount of blameworthiness in our world. Namely, we are left unable to blame individuals who lived long ago. I've already discussed why I do not see this as hugely problematic, but it is important to understand the magnitude of change to our traditional standards of morality that this results in.

First, I must state that this is not a novel position to hold. Many arguments have been advanced over the years defending ancient evils against blame. Gideon Rosen has posited that, just as one is only blameworthy for something done out of epistemic ignorance on the condition that they are blameworthy for that ignorance, one is also only blameworthy for something done out of *moral* ignorance if they are blameworthy for *that* ignorance. That is to say, if one, even after a reasonable level of moral reflection, likely wouldn't be able to determine an act morally wrong, due to their moral environment, they are not blameworthy for an ignorance of its wrongness, and thus for performing the act itself. Imagining a Hittite slaveowner who reflects on his practice and can't find moral grounds to stop, he writes that "given the intellectual and cultural resources available to a second millennium Hittite lord, it would have taken a moral genius to see through to the wrongness of chattel slavery. [...] If the historical situation is as we have supposed, then the appropriate attitude is rather a version of what Strawson calls the 'objective' attitude."⁸¹

When breaking down my version of blame to its key constituents, specifically our ability to empathize, we can see that this position is also in accord with Hume, who suggested temporal distance as a

key hurdle to *sympathy*. One cannot “feel the same lively pleasure from the virtues of a person, who lived in Greece two thousand years ago, that I feel from the virtues of a familiar friend and acquaintance,” even when one doesn’t “esteem the one more than the other.”⁸²

Still, despite the presence of these arguments, their results are counterintuitive to many. Blame, it seems, is absolutely essential to understanding one’s connection to others and the moral world at large. In the first paragraph of D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini’s anthology on the topic, they state “uncontroversial is the fact that *blame* is, for better or worse, a central part of human relationships.”⁸³ To advocate for a world with less blaming looks akin to advocating for a world with fewer relationships. In one sense, I am willing to say this—not that I’m pushing for us to reduce the number of relationships we have, but that I’m pushing for us to recognize our limitations in relating to others and adjust our blame practices accordingly. I’ve already mentioned my lack of any argument against Nagel’s fears of people and actions becoming mere things and events as it relates to those for whom criticism is most applicable. I think we must be willing to admit that the section of the world that we can consistently view with the subjective point of view is actually relatively small. Because of this, the prospect that we can’t blame many who we previously assumed that we could, or that blame is simply a lot less prevalent in the world than we intuit it should be, are pills that we ought to be willing to swallow. If one feels evaluatively neutered by their often being unable to discredit another’s morality as an agent, then they should reevaluate their motivations for blaming in the first place.

II.xx | *How to be Better Blamers*

If you’re willing to buy into what I’ve thus far been selling, you may be left with one final question: *how* in the world do we go about doing this? My interpretation of blame relies strongly on individuals’ capacity to empathize with one another, and while Hume was willing to place immense confidence in the view that this is a basic human capacity, others may not be. To the question ‘how do we become better blamers?’ I can offer no quick and easy answer. There are certain encouragements which would clearly be helpful: expanding one’s range of experiences, opening up dialogue between those in different circumstances, becoming more

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aware of one's own practices of moral self-reflection. Additionally, promoting consumption and literacy of various forms of art would most definitely improve our ability to understand the choices of both those whose dissimilar past experiences has engendered in them a dissimilar perspective, and those who face a decision unlike those we've previously faced. This need not be limited to explicitly narrative art created by individuals explicitly different than us in certain measurable ways, but may also include art which more subtly expands our worldview.

This rather vague call to action will, to some, only confirm their view that this interpretation is mostly a pipe dream. While it finds its origins in Hume, the interpretation is asking our powers of empathy to stretch further, and more consciously, than Hume ever suggested or is plausible. We can't simply *tell* people—at least some kinds of people—to empathize more or more effectively; it's implausible that this paradigm of blame and criticism could ever come to fruition. To these empathetic involuntarists, I ask from what origin their belief comes. I concede that my interpretation is more convoluted, and asks more of the blamer, than others, specifically rigid Kantian deontology. But I do not agree that it's on its face more implausible that a majority of more complex moral systems, which ask evaluators to take a large number of factors into account and, as Part I showed, often leaves them at a loss. In the Aristotelian tradition, an upbringing in an environment which values the sharp distinction between the objective and subjective point of view, between superficial and meaningful empathy, and between doing bad and being bad, would allow for this interpretation to take hold. And if it does not, nothing in my proposal is beyond the capacities of most any individual to incorporate into their life.

Notes

1. Zimmerman, *Moral Luck: A Partial Map*, 585
2. Ibid, 586
3. Haji, *Luck's Mischief*, 5
4. Waller, *Against Moral Responsibility*, 182
5. Jacobs, *Choosing Character: Responsibility for Virtue and Vice*, 68
6. Pereboom, *Book Review of Reason's Debt to Freedom: Normative Appraisals, Reasons, and Free Will*
7. Schroeder, *Ought, Agents, and Actions*, 3
8. Ibid, 1
9. Ibid, 7

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10. Andre, *Nagel, Williams, and Moral Luck*, 204
11. Ibid, 205
12. Ibid
13. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a
14. Ibid, 1099b
15. Ibid, 1099a
16. Andre, *Nagel, Williams, and Moral Luck*, 204
17. Williams, *Blame and Responsibility* (cited in Bell, *The Standing to Blame: A Critique* in Coates and Tognazzini, *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, 269)
18. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, II.iii.2, 264
19. McGeer, *Civilizing Blame* (in Coates and Tognazzini, *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, 174)
20. Zimmerman, *An Essay on Moral Responsibility*, 38
21. Haji, *Luck's Mischief*, 87
22. Watson, *The Two Faces of Responsibility*, 231
23. Ibid, 230
24. Ibid, 233
25. Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment* (in Fischer and Ravizza, *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility*, 46)
26. Ibid, 64
27. Watson, *Responsibility and the Limits of Evil* (cited in Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 74)
28. Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 75
29. Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing*, 26
30. Macnamara, *Taking Demands Out of Blame* (in Coates and Tognazzini, *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, 142)
31. Wertheimer, *Constraining Condemning*, 491
32. Coates and Tognazzini, *The Contours of Blame* (in *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, 7-17)
33. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, II.1.xi, 206
34. Ibid, II.1.xi, 208
35. Ibid, II.1.iii, 184
36. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 122-123
37. Scanlon, *Interpreting Blame* (in Coates and Tognazzini, *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, 84-85)
38. Ibid, 86
39. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 128
40. Ibid, 146
41. Ibid, 167
42. Ibid, 168
43. Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment* (in Fischer and Ravizza, *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility*, 64)
44. Ibid, 48
45. Ibid, 52
46. Ibid, 52
47. Zimmerman, *Moral Luck: A Partial Map*, 594
48. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, II.1.xi, 208
49. Williams, *Moral Luck* (in Statman, *Moral Luck*, 42)
50. Ibid
51. Sher, *In Praise of Blame*, 112
52. Franklin, *Valuing Blame* (in Coates and Tognazzini, *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, 211)
53. Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment* (in Fischer and Ravizza, *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility*, 52)

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54. Wertheimer, *Constraining Condemning*, 491
55. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, II.1.xi, 208
56. Scanlon, *Interpreting Blame* (in Coates and Tognazzini, *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, 84-85)
57. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 146
58. Ibid, 145
59. Zimmerman, *Taking Luck Seriously*, 564
60. Hieronymi, *The Force and Fairness of Blame*, 124
61. Watson, *The Two Faces of Responsibility*, 238
62. Ibid, 238-239
63. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 171
64. Ibid, 139
65. Frankfurt, *Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility*, 835-836
66. Pereboom, *Living Without Free Will*, 8-12
67. Bell, *The Standing to Blame: A Critique* (in Coates and Tognazzini, *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, 265)
68. Ibid, 273
69. Ibid, 275
70. Wolf, *Criticizing Blame*, 11 (Unpublished Manuscript)
71. Ibid, 12
72. Clarke, *Omissions*, 167 (cited in Haji, *Luck's Mischief*, 175)
73. Wolf, *Criticizing Blame*, 9 (Unpublished Manuscript)
74. Ibid, 10
75. Ibid, 9
76. Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 37
77. Haji, *Luck's Mischief*, 8
78. Williams, *Postscript* (in Statman, *Moral Luck*, 251)
79. Wertheimer, *Constraining Condemning*, 489
80. Zimmerman, *Moral Luck: A Partial Map*, 595
81. Rosen, *Culpability and Ignorance*, 66
82. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, III.3.i, 371
83. Coates and Tognazzini, *The Contours of Blame* (in *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, 3)

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Though I'd known that I'd wanted to write a thesis for a while, this process truly began with an email to Professor Vida Yao in February of my Junior year. In it was a hodgepodge of ideas as well as a lament that all of them were likely impossible to execute. I'm grateful to Professor Yao for her encouragement, disallowing me from giving in to this feeling of logistical impossibility, and for introducing me to Professor George Sher.

I'd never had so much as a conversation with Professor Sher before our initial meeting to go over possible thesis ideas. We immediately connected over our love of the work of Thomas Nagel, and decided that working through the issues presented in his essay on moral luck would be a worthy cause. Of course, as tends to happen when one spends time with Professor Sher, before long the thesis had become decidedly blame-centric; a far more fruitful direction of inquiry when all was said and done. Professor Sher has been nothing but supportive and helpful in his suggestions and criticisms, and it has been a pleasure to work with him.

Additionally, a shout out is in order for the peers who've gone through the process with me. Jason Barton's writing of a thesis last year was the original inspiration for my wanting to complete one. Carly Frieders and Bilal Rehman are the other two Seniors to be writing an Honors Thesis in philosophy this year, and I think we'd all agree that the ordeal has been made easier by the supportive environment that we've created for each other.

As I write this, I am in the final week of what's abruptly and surreally become a truncated last semester of college. Yet I refuse to allow that to mark the end of my dialogue, philosophical and otherwise, with any and all of the people here mentioned, as well as the Rice Philosophy Department as a whole.

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