

Towards a Psychologically and Normatively Plausible Account of Blame

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Blame is an experience we are all very much acquainted with. In cases where we feel wronged or slighted, we may blame people, circumstances, or fate. We often feel angry and resentful, desiring some sort of reparations for the wrong that has been done. Sometimes blame is outwardly expressed, other times we keep it to ourselves. Although blame is something we all deal with in our everyday lives, up until recently, the topic received little attention in the realm of moral philosophy. The struggle to define blame's essential and defining characteristics in addition to nailing down reasons for what makes blame appropriate, justified, fair, or deserved, continues. Many theories circulate and all face issues. Despite this, moral philosophers have indeed reached one conclusion across the board: figuring out the answers to these questions matters.

In this paper, I will focus specifically on the account of blame advanced by Victoria McGeer. In her essay, "Civilizing Blame," McGeer strives to present an account of blame that is both *psychologically plausible* and *normatively acceptable*. She argues that her account is psychologically plausible in that it successfully captures our folk concept of blame, and it is normatively acceptable in that it successfully establishes the justification or warrant of blame as a negative response to wrongdoing. Here I will accept McGeer's claim that psychological and normative plausibility constitute two essential desiderata that any satisfactory account of blame ought to

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be able to satisfy. I will first defend McGeer's arguments in support of these two desiderata and then provide my own reasons for why we ought to adopt these two criteria. Second, I will discuss McGeer's naturalistic account of blame, an account which she believes meets her two conditions. Third, I will argue that her positive view of blame currently contains a feature which fails to be normatively plausible. While I accept McGeer's contention that when we blame wrongdoers, we seek to motivate a change in their *behavior*, I argue that it is normatively implausible for blamers to seek a change in wrongdoers' *attitudes*, at least, insofar as attitudes are conceived of as emotions. Given this problematic feature of McGeer's positive account of blame, I argue in the last section that we must revise McGeer's overall account of blame by jettisoning this feature. Only then will the psychological and normative plausibility of her account of blame be restored.

The Importance of Psychological and Normative Plausibility

Before diving into the specific features of McGeer's account of blame, it is helpful to lay out some relatively uncontroversial and generally accepted features of moral blame. Most take the concept of moral blame to be a perception of or response to wrongdoing, where wrongdoing is generally understood as the expression of deliberate moral disregard or disrespect through an agent's actions or attitudes. McGeer, along with other moral philosophers,¹ follows the line of thinking originally proposed by that there are often negative reactive attitudes, or emotions, that accompany blame. The negative reactive attitudes include anger, indignation, and resentment. Most of the philosophers theorizing about blame believe the reactive attitudes to be an essential feature of blame, while others simply believe them to be a characteristic, though not essential, feature of blame. Those who acknowledge the substantive role of the reactive attitudes in blame motivate their standpoint by underscoring the important motivational role that these emotions play in rendering wrongdoing salient to us and moving us into action via blaming. They also argue that the reactive attitudes deliberately express and communicate the intensity of our disapproval of wrongdoing. In other words, if wrongdoing did not matter to us in some significant sense, it seems difficult to see why we get so worked up about it. If I witness a man kick his dog for what seems to be no good reason and then have no affective or emotional response whatsoever, most people

¹Wallace (2013, 222–43), McKenna (2013, 119–40), Macnamara (2013, 155–56).

would probably think I am a heartless wretch. We expect people to have an effective recoil in response to instances of injustice and wrongdoing. For all these reasons, most grant that a psychologically plausible account of blame must acknowledge the substantive role of the reactive attitudes in our blaming practices. In this paper, I adopt the reactive attitude conception of blame.

The primary reason blame has gained considerable attention is because there seems to be a normative conflict between the value of blame and its punitive edge. In other words, it seems difficult to provide a moral defense of something that can be as problematic and harmful as blame. Blame is not pleasant, not for the blamer nor for the target of that person's blame. Indeed, blame can often lead to various psychological and even physical harms, whether that harm be through a person's withdrawal from the wrongdoer (Scanlon 84-99; Bennett 66-83), the deliberate setback to a wrongdoer's welfare interests (McKenna 119-40), legal imprisonment, or some other unpleasant outcome. These negative consequences thus pose the question, how could we possibly justify something as messy, punitive, and harmful as blame? Reconciling the tension between a psychologically plausible account of blame (a theory which includes blame's punitive edge) and the normative acceptability of blame, will be of considerable importance throughout this paper. Let us begin by discussing the sanitized approach.

Sanitizers (Scanlon 84-99; Sher 49-65) choose to circumvent the normative worry altogether by purging blame of its normatively unsavory characteristics, but this gives us good reason to think that in doing so, the sanitizers simply change the subject. They gain normative acceptability at the cost of psychological plausibility. What the sanitizers identify as blame ultimately ends up bearing little resemblance to blame as ordinarily conceived. For example, Sher defines blame as a *belief* that an agent has acted wrongly and a *desire* that the person had not acted in that way (Smith 33-37). Yet many recognize that this sanitized version of blame fails to align with our folk concept of blame, and thus seems to change the subject. Under Sher's view, blame simply amounts to a sort of cool recognition of wrongdoing and a blasé desire that the person had not done what he or she did (Sher 49-65). But surely our folk concept of blame possesses more than this. When a person blames a wrongdoer, they do not merely believe that a person acted wrongly and desire that they had not done what they did. That person is often angry and resentful. Their registering of wrongdoing is often accompanied by a strong reactive attitude like anger or indignation; it is emotionally charged and forceful in nature. Yet, Sher's account of blame fails to acknowledge this key feature of blame. Sher's account, along with the other sanitized accounts, thus falls short of psychological plausibility.

Sanitized accounts fail to adequately capture our folk concept of blame and simply do not track the phenomenon in question. The belief-desire pair construal of blame bears little resemblance to blame as ordinarily conceived, and this is a problem.

If the sanitizers' version of blame fails to adequately capture our folk concept of blame, it seems the sanitizers have simply changed the subject. But, changing the subject is bad; if sanitizers present a view of blame that fails to align with what we actually think blame is, it is doubtful that the sanitizer's view could tell us anything of substance or value about our actual blaming practices and their justification. In other words, the sanitized view would fail to tell us anything about whether or not particular attributions of blame are appropriate, fitting, or fair. Yet, the way we ultimately conceive of blame affects how we deal with questions of moral responsibility, punishment, justification, desert, etc. If the sanitized approach fails to track our ordinary understanding of what blame is, there is no good reason to think it can tell us anything of significance about our blaming practices and their justification. For these reasons, any satisfying and realistic account of blame needs to accommodate the paradigmatic features of blame, and that includes the unpleasant, emotional force of blame. An account of blame that does not grant a substantive role to the reactive attitudes is psychologically implausible, and psychological plausibility is of the utmost importance in crafting a satisfying account of blame. This is how we know we do not fall prey to changing the subject. In short, agreeing upon a psychologically plausible account of blame is imperative; it is the starting point for all further theorizing about blame.

If we grant that there indeed exists a psychologically plausible account of blame (some ordinary concept of blame that includes its force and punitive sting), the next task consists in providing an argument in defense of blame's normative value. Anyone who seeks to provide a positive account of moral blame needs to argue that blame "is indeed 'fairly' or 'properly' directed at a wrongdoer in light of the wrong he or she has done" (McGeer 165). If we genuinely take psychological plausibility seriously as a key desideratum for blame and thus grant a substantive role to the negative reactive attitudes, we find ourselves in a bit of a pickle. How can we justify something as nasty and harmful as blame? As mentioned before, blame is not pleasant, and it can often lead to psychological and physical harms. Can harm ever be fundamentally deserved or fair? If it ends up being the case that blame seems morally indefensible, there is good reason to think we ought to eliminate it from our moral practices.

Before answering these questions, however, it is important to get clear on what exactly we mean by normative plausibility. Is normative plausibility a matter of desert, justification, warrant, or fairness? Unfortunately, there

is not any easy answer to this question. For the most part, however, most seem interested in securing the bare minimum of justification. For example, Christopher Franklin asserts that blame is an essential way by which we demonstrate our valuing of the objects of moral value (207–23). He claims that when it comes to valuing the objects that generate moral values, this valuing is not optional (Franklin 207–23). The objects that generate moral values *require* valuation, and the proper way of valuing them involves our *defense* and *protection* of them (Franklin 207–23). Thus, within the wider framework of our moral values, blame is valuable and the harm it involves is indeed justified (Franklin 207–23). Angela Smith sees blame as a way by which we express our moral protest against the claim implicit in an agent's actions or attitudes (Smith 27–48). Thus, for her, blame is also valuable and justified within the larger scheme of our moral practices. Christopher Bennett claims that blame is necessary for symbolizing or expressing our disapproval of the wrongdoer's action (Bennett 66–83). In other words, when we blame, we demonstrate that we take wrongdoing seriously and will not let it go uncontested. Each of these views strives to deliver a justification of our blaming practices through an appeal to a particular view of their overall value. Blame is justified because of what it communicates: our disapproval of wrongdoing.

In this section, I have laid the general landscape for the discussion surrounding blame. I have argued that any satisfying account of blame must be both psychologically and normatively plausible. The sanitized accounts fail to be psychologically plausible because they simply do not track the phenomenon in question. In purging blame of its normatively dissatisfying characteristics, they change the subject. If an account of blame is to be truly satisfying and realistic, it needs to accommodate the paradigmatic features of blame, and that includes the unpleasant, emotional force of blame. An account of blame that does not grant a substantive role to the reactive attitudes fails to be psychologically plausible. If we grant that there exists a psychologically plausible account of blame, one that acknowledges the key role of the reactive attitudes, the next task consists in providing an argument in defense of blame's normative value. We must show that blame, despite its potential for harm, is indeed justified, deserved, or fair. If it ends up being the case that blame is morally indefensible, the upshot is that we ought to eliminate it from our moral practices.

McGeer's Naturalistic Account of Blame

Now that we have a substantive grasp of the importance of psychological and normative plausibility in creating a satisfying account of blame, let

us now turn to a discussion of McGeer's naturalistic account of blame, an account which she thinks meets both of these desiderata. As I have already emphasized, any psychologically plausible account of blame must acknowledge the characteristic presence of the reactive attitudes. McGeer's naturalistic account grants precisely this, but in particular, anger. By her account, anger is "rapid and involuntary... not cognitively mediated in a reflective or judgmental sense," and involves a "backward-looking element of appraisal" along with "a forward-looking action-priming element" as well (McGeer 171). The backward-looking element of appraisal is the perception of the transgression of a social norm, and the forward-looking action-priming element is the subsequent aggressive response which aims to alter or thwart such transgressions. Adherence to social norms was crucial for the survival of communal species, so the cognitive and affective mechanisms that supported such adherence were naturally selected through evolution (McGeer 171). In short, basic emotions like anger have served important signaling functions along with action-priming functions, functions that were essential to the continued existence of communal species.

McGeer takes these findings to be a springboard from which we can start to craft an account of the phenomenon of blame. The key feature that the evolutionary story described above leaves out, however, is the reflective, self-controlled nature of blame. In other words, McGeer argues that the elemental blame depicted above does not make room for the fact that we can "withhold or suppress our blame when we judge... that someone does not deserve such a response despite his or her transgressive behavior" (McGeer 173). In other words, blame can be controlled by reasons. If it ends up being the case that we perceive a wrongdoer's behavior as exhibiting malicious intent when what happened was simply an accident, we can choose to withhold blame. McGeer believes that this basic, primitive emotion of anger ultimately became more refined and sophisticated as a result of our 'mentalizing' capacities and now shows up in the phenomenon of blame. She claims that we can now comprehend what and why other people do what they do, for we take actions to be reflective of a person's beliefs, desires, intentions, emotions, etc. The backward-looking appraisal dimension of blame proves that not only do we blame wrongdoers for what they do, but "we care deeply about the underlying attitudes that motivate and thereby explain what others do" (McGeer 173). In other words, we code certain actions and behaviors based on the perceived attitudes which gave rise to such behavior. McGeer asserts that we care about these underlying attitudes because these attitudes can be useful in predicting future patterns of behavior. For this reason, McGeer argues that:

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, working to promote this change first and foremost through our blaming reaction. (McGeer 174)

In other words, because attitudes often motivate people's behavior, McGeer believes that unfavorable and destructive attitudes ought to be changed. She thinks this change can be stimulated through blame. It is important to note that it may be the case that our backward-looking appraisal may sometimes misinterpret a person's underlying attitude as being interpersonally deficient when it is not. If it ends up being the case that the perceived attitudinal deficiency was not in fact present, that is, we made an error in perception, our blaming emotions naturally dissipate. In cases where the backward-looking appraisal is not mistaken, the forward-looking regulative aim of blame strives to motivate wrongdoers to acknowledge that their actions did indeed exhibit a bad attitude and then "take responsibility for not so harming again by changing or regulating the attitudes that led to the offensive behavior" (McGeer 175). McGeer thinks that wrongdoers can persuasively demonstrate all of this through their own reactive attitudes, which may include guilt, shame, or remorse.

In sum, McGeer's naturalistic account of blame grants a substantive role to the reactive attitudes in our blaming practices. She argues that these attitudes emerged out of basic emotions, such as anger, in order to promote survival of communal species. With time, due to our mentalizing capacities anger transformed into the more refined, reflective, sophisticated phenomenon of blame. Blame, like anger, involves a backward-looking appraisal and a forward-looking regulative end. These backward-looking and forward-looking dimensions involve the perception of deficient attitudes in the wrongdoer along with the aim of changing the deficient attitudes that gave rise to this behavior.

It seems like we finally have a view which is psychologically plausible, for McGeer's view does acknowledge the substantive role of the reactive attitudes in our blaming practices. However, McGeer, though successful in her overarching goal to create a psychologically plausible account of blame, ultimately fails to deliver a normatively plausible account of blame. She gained psychological plausibility but at the cost of normative plausibility, the exact inverse of the sanitized approach.

The Aim of Blame

I will now argue that as it stands, McGeer's account of blame fails to meet the very desiderata she argues so strongly for. McGeer asserts that blame aims to change or regulate the deficient attitudes implicit in a wrongdoer's actions. While I can accept that blamers seek to change wrongdoers' *behavior*, I argue that it is normatively implausible for blamers to seek to change wrongdoers' *attitudes*, at least, insofar as attitudes are primarily conceived of as emotions. Many will agree with the intuition that one of the outcomes we seek when we blame someone is that the wrongdoer feel guilty for what they have done. Blamers want wrongdoers to experience a genuine sense of guilt and remorse for their actions. Blamers then hope that this guilt will inspire the wrongdoer to make amends for their wrongful actions in some way, shape, or form.

It is important to consider, however, what precisely McGeer means by this claim that when we blame someone, we aim to change their deficient attitudes. Is this aim a *demand*? If blame is a demand that a wrongdoer feel guilty, we are in deep trouble. The demand that someone feel guilty is unintelligible or at least a psychologically implausible demand (Macnamara 155–56). Guilt is simply not within a wrongdoer's control, that is, one cannot simply force oneself to feel guilty. If a person does not *feel* guilty, they cannot simply decide, "Okay, I am going to feel guilty now" or "Okay, I am going to feel guilty because you told me to." Recent work in moral psychology suggests that emotions are not always under our control. Some argue that our moral judgments arise automatically and without effort as a result of our moral intuitions (Haidt 343–58). Moral intuitions are understood as the as the abrupt manifestation of a moral judgment as a result of an affective valence (good-bad, like-dislike) in a person's mind. These intuitions emerge immediately and without any process of searching, comparing evidence, or coming to a conclusion. In short, moral psychologists have found the emotions to be automatic and crucial in moral judgment formation (Blair 48–63). Others have pointed out that the emotions also deeply influence and can indeed bias our intuitions and thus moral judgments as well (Knobe and Nichols 530–54). The important point to take away here, however, is that recent studies in moral psychology suggest that the emotions are automatic responses, that is, they arise prior to any cognitive reasoning or processing. Because they are automatic, there is good reason to think the emotions are not something within our control. It is therefore psychologically implausible and indeed normatively implausible to demand that a wrongdoer feel a certain way. Such a demand requires that the agent somehow miraculously take control of something that is psychologically beyond their control. But what good

sense, pragmatically and normatively speaking, is it to desire a wrongdoer feel guilty when such an attitude is not within the wrongdoer's power to control in the first place? In short, that is not fair. If some emotions, like guilt, are indeed sentiments not within an agent's power to control, then it is not fair to expect them to change them. In other words, it is not fair to expect someone to do something not within their power to do.

A few examples may motivate this point. Vegetarianism and veganism are on the rise in Western culture. Many of us have probably heard or seen various lectures, commercials, documentaries, or presentations regarding the ethical deplorability of factory farming, meat consumption, and environmental destruction. While we may absolutely grant the force of these arguments, it is quite possible that some of us will lack a concurrent affective resonance. This does not mean that we are callous, inconsiderate human beings. We may just not feel as strongly as others about these particular issues. Let's consider an example. Suppose I go out to a restaurant with my vegetarian friend, Ashley. I take a few moments to peruse the menu and then decide to order a Jamaican dry-rubbed grass fed medium-rare all natural rib-eye. I close my menu and look across the table at Ashley's appalled face. Her eyes turn to slits and she barks, "How could you! You know how wrong it is to eat meat! I demand that you feel guilty for your actions!" Is it psychologically plausible for Ashley to demand that I feel guilty for my choice of entrée? I think no. After all, I cannot simply force myself to feel the emotion of guilt. That is something which is simply not within my psychological control. Furthermore, it is *unfair* for her to demand that I feel guilty. It is not fair to demand that someone take control of something which is literally outside of their control. Now, could I and meat-eaters in general change our behavior and stop eating meat and satisfy a vegetarian or vegan without the affective sentiment of guilt? I do not see why not. In other words, the affective sentiment of guilt does not seem necessary for a change in behavior. I may choose to stop eating meat out of respect for my vegetarian friends, or I may do so for self-interested reasons, that is, because I fear they will withdraw their friendship from me if I do not change my behavior. The key point, however, is that it is psychologically and normatively implausible for a vegetarian or vegan to demand that I feel guilty for eating meat. Moreover, it is not evident that guilt is necessary to motivate a change in behavior.

Consider another example. Many philosophers of religion have striven to persuade non-believers of the existence of God. There have been ontological arguments, cosmological arguments, intelligent design arguments, arguments from efficient causality, and etc. Some have even employed guilt and shame tactics to try and change atheistic attitudes. People who believe in God may underscore the sinful, deplorable nature

of humanity and condemn the arrogance that undergirds another person's denial of the existence of God. They may demand that atheists feel guilty for their sinful, arrogant nature and repent and believe in God. Yet this demand again is neither psychologically plausible nor is it fair. The atheist cannot simply force oneself to feel guilty and it is not fair for a believer to demand such a change in attitude. As mentioned before, affect and intuitions are not always within our control; they are automatic. Consequently, atheists cannot simply choose to feel guilty, and so it is unfair to expect them to stimulate that emotion in themselves as well. In addition, like the vegetarian case, it is not clear that guilt is necessary for a person to come to have belief in God. This change may be brought about in other ways. A non-believer may have a life-altering experience or choose to comport themselves in such a way that reflects a belief in God for they see the value in doing so. They may be inspired by the lifestyle that emerges from a belief in God. In short, a change in their attitudes or behavior may emerge without the affective accompaniment of guilt.

Both of these examples illustrate and motivate the psychological evidence that certain emotions, like guilt, lie beyond our psychological control. I want to underscore, however, that this charge of unfairness against the blamer's demand that a wrongdoer feel guilty goes even deeper. Given what we know about human development, whether or not we turn out to be the kind of person who feels certain reactive attitudes (like guilt) in certain situations (in instances of wrongdoing) also seems outside of our control. Let me illustrate this point by way of an example.

We now know thanks to modern science and psychology that humans are undeniably a product of nature and nurture (Strawson 5–22); we are shaped both by our genetics and our surrounding environment. Consider a criminal like Robert Alton Harris. In the late 1970's, Robert Harris abducted two teenage boys from a fast food restaurant, forced them to drive into the woods at gunpoint, and then proceeded to brutally murder them, steal their car, and rob a bank (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation). Harris was convicted of his crimes and sentenced to death at San Quentin State Prison. Is it fair to blame Robert Harris for his crimes? Most will say yes, but let's think about this for a moment. Upon further investigation, it was ultimately discovered that Robert Harris grew up in an extremely dysfunctional household. Both of his parents were alcoholics, and Harris suffered from fetal alcohol syndrome. He was abused by his father and his mother barely touched him as a child (touch is considered to be crucial in stable child development) (Ardiel and Rankin 153–56). After stealing a car as a young teen, Harris was sent to a juvenile detention facility where he endured repeated rapes. He was abandoned by his parents by the age 14. Needless to say, Harris suffered a fairly abhorrent childhood.

All Harris was exposed to throughout the crucial developmental years of his life were abuse, dysfunction, and neglect. Because of this, Harris was likely never able to recognize good and sufficient reasons to behave in a way that was different than all he had ever known. Is it *fair* to demand that Harris feel guilty for his crimes? If Harris could not have avoided becoming the type of person with the character that he did as a result of factors beyond his control (genetics and environment), it seems wildly unfair for us to demand that he feel guilty, for he is arguably just not that kind of person who can even feel guilt. Not only can Harris not force himself to feel guilty, but it is clear that his deficient attitudes and emotions flow from a morally disturbed character not of his own design. If the character he came to have was beyond his control, it seems by default that we cannot demand he change the deficient emotions or attitudes that flow from that very same character. After all, Harris never received any moral direction whatsoever. In other words, he arguably never had the ability to both recognize and respond to good and sufficient reasons for his actions. Consequently, he arguably is not the kind of person who can even feel guilt. For all of these reasons, it is unfair to expect Harris to feel guilty for his actions.

This problem we face with Robert Harris, however, presents us with a much deeper worry. *All* of us are shaped by genetic and environmental factors beyond our control. We do not make ourselves, that is, who we are is not ultimately up to us (Strawson 5–22). We are a product of our genetics and culture. We cannot create or control our character or our reactive attitudes, and this includes our emotional responses to the moral attributions of others. Yet, it seems that both control over one's emotional responses to the moral attributions of others and control over one's character are necessary for genuine desert and fairness. But, both of these seem off the table. This suggests that true fairness and desert of our blaming practices is off the table. If an agent's action stems from a causally determined process that originates in factors beyond their control, then the agent will correspondingly lack the control necessary to be genuinely morally responsible for it (Pereboom 407–24). No blame can ever be truly deserved or fair in a fundamental sense (Strawson 5–22). The normative plausibility of our blaming practices, therefore, seems to be seriously threatened by this concern.

In this section, I have argued that as it stands, McGeer's account of blame fails to meet the very desiderata she argues so strongly for. She gained psychological plausibility but at the expense of normative plausibility. While I accept that blamers seek to change wrongdoers' *behavior*, I argue that it is normatively implausible for blame to seek to change wrongdoers' *attitudes*, at least, insofar as attitudes are primarily conceived of as emotions. If when we blame we express the demand that a wrongdoers feel guilty for their

actions, we are expressing a psychologically and normatively implausible demand. Guilt does not seem to be within one's psychological control, and for this reason, it is not fair to demand that people to feel guilty for their actions. Moreover, it is not clear that guilt is necessarily required to stimulate a change in behavior. People may choose to change their behavior absent the affective sentiment of guilt, that is, for purely self-interested reasons. I also argued that this charge of unfairness goes even deeper. Studies on human development give us good reason to believe that we have no control over whether or not we turn out to be the kind of person who feels certain reactive attitudes (like guilt) in certain circumstances (like in instances of wrongdoing). If we truly take seriously that we cannot fully control our emotional responses to the moral attributions of others or our overall character from which they flow, the fairness and desert of our blaming practices seems off the table. In other words, it seems that no blame can ever be truly deserved or fair in a fundamental sense.

The Solution

Now that we have extensively drawn out the tension between the psychological and normative plausibility, we are left with one question: what now? Should we give up one of the desiderata? Is normative plausibility simply not in the cards for blame? My answer to both of these questions is a resounding *no*. In section 1 of the paper, I discussed at length the importance of both of these desiderata. I left the question open, however, regarding what exactly we mean by normative plausibility. If by normative plausibility we mean genuine desert and fairness, I am afraid we must abandon ship. If we truly take seriously that we cannot fully control our affective attitudes and our overall character from which they flow, features which seem necessary for genuine desert and fairness, it seems the fairness and desert of our blaming practices flies out the window. Does this then entail that blame is normatively indefensible? No. Just because blame cannot be genuinely deserved or fair in a fundamental sense, this does not mean that blame cannot be justified in some other sense. Blame is *instrumentally* valuable. As so many of the philosophers in this volume have pointed out, blame is valuable within the grand scheme of our moral practices. It is useful and normatively valuable, but in a purely instrumental and consequentialist sense. Blame contributes to the furthering of a greater good, and that greater good is morality as whole.

In order to restore psychological and normative plausibility of McGeer's account of blame, therefore, I argue that we ought to not blame with the demand or desire that a wrongdoer change their deficient attitudes

or emotions. That is a psychologically and normatively implausible demand. Instead, I argue that we ought to blame wrongdoers with the more modest goal of motivating a wrongdoer to (1) acknowledge that what he or she did was wrong and (2) make amends through a consent to move forward differently. If we take this to be our goal when we blame someone, we now have a psychologically and normatively plausible account of blame. I argue that this revision can also secure the bare minimum of justification for our blaming practices.

When we blame someone, we want them to acknowledge that what they did was wrong, that is, we want them take responsibility for their actions. Not only do we want them to take responsibility for their actions, but we also want them to change their behavior moving forward. If that change in behavior is also inspired by a shift in the wrongdoer's attitudes, that is, as a result of some sense of guilt or remorse, even better! We cannot and ought to not however, make a change in a wrongdoer's attitudes the primary goal in our blaming practices. That demand or desire is fundamentally unfair and will ultimately leave us disappointed far more often than satisfied.

Some may argue that we now face a motivational worry. If wrongdoers do not feel the affective sentiment of guilt for their actions, why would they change their behavior? In other words, what would motivate them to make such a change? Are not the reactive attitudes required for this motivational role? As demonstrated through the meat eater and the vegetarian example, guilt is not required to stimulate a change in behavior. It may be the case that wrongdoers acknowledge what they did was insensitive and consent to move differently purely for self-interested reasons, i.e., they do not want to make you mad. In other words, wrongdoers may not feel genuine remorse or guilt for their actions, but they can still choose to make changes in their behavior exclusively out of a desire to avoid psychological or physical harms. They may do this out of fear of imprisonment or loss of a friendship, or perhaps they may do this because they are inspired by what new possibilities open up as a result of such a change. Obviously, some of us will still prefer that wrongdoers feel guilty for their actions, but unfortunately, we do not always get what we want. What matters most, pragmatically speaking, is that we curtail wrongdoing as much as possible with the least amount of harm and suffering possible. When we teach a child to become a morally responsible human being, we do not use guilt and shame tactics. We can motivate changes in behavior through positive reinforcement, explanations for why certain behaviors are better over others, etc. In short, moral education does not always require harm or suffering to the person being educated, nor should it. After all, we have already established that blame cannot be

fundamentally deserved and fair in a basic sense. For that reason, we ought to minimize harm and suffering where we can.

It is important to note that minimizing harm and suffering ought to not bottom out in the elimination of blame altogether. Blame is instrumentally valuable. When we blame wrongdoers, we demonstrate that we take wrongdoing seriously and will not let it go uncontested. If we fail to blame, we arguably become complicit in wrongdoing (Bennett 76). If we do not outwardly express or symbolize our disapproval of a wrongdoing in some way, shape, or form, we are essentially teaching wrongdoers that their misdeeds may go on uncontested. In other words, if there no aversive responses to wrongdoing, it seems difficult to see why wrongdoers would ever change their behavior. Hence, blame serves an aversive conditioning role. Experiencing blame and being subject to the harms that often accompany it is not pleasant, and for this reason, blame can deter wrongdoing. It might not be deterring wrongdoing for the 'right reasons,' as it is driven by a more self-interested rationale than anything else, but at least wrongdoing is being diminished nonetheless. In short, blame is instrumentally valuable as a negative response to wrongdoing, for in light of its unpleasant effects, it can motivate wrongdoers to change their behavior.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued in favor of adopting McGeer's desiderata of psychological and normative plausibility in crafting a satisfying account of blame. If an account of blame is to be truly psychologically plausible, it must fit our ordinary concept of blame and thus include the force and punitive sting of blame. The account of blame must also be normatively acceptable in that it shows that blame is morally defensible despite its propensity to harm. I have argued that as McGeer's account stands, it fails to meet these two desiderata. It is neither psychologically nor normatively plausible for blamers to demand a change in the attitudes of wrongdoers, at least insofar as attitudes are conceived in a primarily emotional sense. Emotions, like guilt, are often not something within an agent's control and so it is unfair to demand that they change something which lies beyond their ability to control. When we blame, we must do so with the more modest goal of motivating wrongdoers to take responsibility for their actions and consent to move forward differently. The harm of blame is instrumentally valuable and justified as a negative response to wrongdoing because it serves an aversive conditioning role. Without it, it is not clear that wrongdoers would be motivated to change their behavior. This normative defense of blame is less robust than some people might have originally envisioned,

but at least it secures the justification of our blame within the complex web of moral practices. With these aforementioned modifications to McGeer's account, we can indeed restore its psychological and normative plausibility.

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