

What's the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation

Abstract: When we hope to explain and perhaps vindicate a practice that is internally diverse, philosophy faces a methodological challenge. Such subject matters are likely to have explanatorily basic features that are not necessary conditions. This prompts a move away from analysis to some other kind of philosophical explanation. This paper proposes a *paradigm based explanation* of one such subject matter: blame. First, a paradigm form of blame is identified—‘Communicative Blame’—where this is understood as a candidate for an explanatorily basic form of blame. Second, its point and purpose in our lives is investigated and found to reside in its power to increase the alignment of the blamer and the wrongdoer’s moral understandings. Third, the hypothesis that Communicative Blame is an explanatorily basic form of blame is tested out by seeing how far other kinds of blame can reasonably be understood as derivative, especially in respect of blame’s point and purpose. Finally, a new and quasi-political worry about blame is raised.

Introduction: Paradigm Based Explanation

Sometimes in philosophy we can explain and thereby vindicate a practice—whether it be the use of a concept, or perhaps a pattern of human interaction—by making explicit its most basic role in our lives. In effect, one can paint a philosophical portrait of the practice—a picture that reveals what the practice is fundamentally like, what its point is. If a valuable point is revealed, then the portrait may amount to a vindication; if the point is disvaluable in some way, then we may have discovered a reason to modify, curtail, or even abandon the practice (whether or not we actually could).

What is it to paint such a portrait in philosophical prose? It can be done by way of a genealogical explanation, but that is not the only way.¹ Instead we might,

more simply and directly, imagine our way into a realistic conception of the most simple and basic form of the extant practice—a paradigm of the phenomenon we want to understand, not only in the sense that it constitutes a clear and central exemplar but also in the sense of being a candidate for an explanatorily basic form. The philosophical imagination may have a job of work to do in singling out such a paradigm from our multiple practice, for what is basic may be somewhat disguised by variant forms, not to mention the pathologies that are likely to attend the practice. In this paper I aim to portray our practice of blame. For a subject such as blame the work of the imagination is most importantly disciplined by the obligation to ‘keep before our minds’, as P. F. Strawson once put it, ‘something it is easy to forget when we are engaged in philosophy...viz. what it is actually like to be involved in ordinary inter-personal relationships, ranging from the most intimate to the most casual’ (Strawson, 1974, p. 6).² By constructing a candidate paradigm—a form of blame I shall label ‘Communicative Blame’—I hope to build a platform from which I can account for non-paradigmatic cases as derivative, and in the process to reveal the essentially constructive character of both this basic kind of blame, and any other kinds that are sufficiently closely derived from it to display a residue of its point, perhaps by displaying it in a different form. While there may well be more than one point in blaming each other for wrongdoing (and allowing of course that people’s actual motives, if any, in blaming may be different again) this overarching transformative function is offered as the core of the answer to the general question whether our practice of blame can be seen, when we step back from it, as serving a positive purpose, or whether we would collectively do better to ‘rise above’ blame to some other way of living with each other’s wrongdoing.

Someone might ask, Why adopt this paradigm based method when one could engage in the cleaner business of conceptual analysis? The answer, in short, is that analysis—understood as the attempt to achieve necessary and sufficient conditions—is not an appropriate method for any subject matters which have philosophically important features that are not necessary conditions. Such features will not figure in any strict definition, for the requisite trial by counter-example must ultimately eliminate them. And yet if these are explanatorily basic

features, they are just the sort of thing that needs to be preserved in a philosophical account that aims to explain the nature of the practice in all its internal diversity. Successful analysis delivers the highest-common-denominator set of features of X; but where X is an internally diverse practice there is a significant risk that the highest common denominator will turn out to be very low, delivering an extremely thin account. In particular, it will not be capable of illuminating how the different forms of the practice are explanatorily related to one another.

The methodological message here is that, depending on the subject matter and on what kind of illumination one hopes to gain from bringing philosophy to bear on it, we should choose our method reflectively. We have options. Obviously, if you are interested in a concept or practice that is held together by family resemblances³, then you know in advance that conceptual analysis is not the way to go, for there will be no analysis to be had. Less obviously, however, there are also subject matters which, even while they might be susceptible to analysis, are nonetheless better handled by a different method. Take blame. Let us assume that there *is* an analysis available. The point is we should not expect any such analysis to be very illuminating, owing to the fact that the practice of blame is significantly disunified, and is therefore likely to have distinctive or otherwise central features that may not be present in all instances.

Blame's diversity is manifest. We go in for blame in different ways and contexts, sometimes in first-personal reflexive mode ('I blame myself for the failure of the marriage'); sometimes in second-personal interactions where the hurt party might be oneself or it might be someone else, near or distant ('It's not okay to make fun of me/him/them/others like that'); and sometimes in third-personal cases, where the blamed party might be any number of individuals, distant or close, or even an institution of some kind ('I blame the doctor/the parents/the school/the government for what happened'). Further diversity is moreover introduced by the fact that each of these forms of blame may or may not involve some emotional colour, and of somewhat different tones. Sometimes our blame is little more than a dispassionate judgement that someone is blameworthy, the

merest answer to the question ‘Whose fault is it?’ (‘I blame the carpenter for the warped table top’); but sometimes it is a judgement invested through-and-through with the deepest moral emotion (‘How could you lie to me like that?’). Furthermore, this emotion might resonate in the key of anger, or of indignation, or moral disapproval; or alternatively it might be largely in the register of sorrow, or bewildered hurt—or indeed any complex, perhaps conflicted, mix of these.

The moral practice I hope to explain in this paper, then, is significantly disunified. So much so that there is good reason to try a paradigm based approach and see what it delivers. Specifically, the hypothesis I shall try out is that there is a basic second-personal interaction of X blaming Y for an action, motive, or attitude (or lack thereof) from which other variant practices can be seen as derivative. To anticipate, in section 1 I shall identify certain pathologies or misuses of blame, in order to remind us why blame has a bad name and so stands in need of vindication, but also in order to set them aside—such cases will not fall in the remit of our vindication. In the second and third sections I shall argue that the basic point of blame is revealed in the illocutionary point of a particular practice of blame labelled ‘Communicative Blame’; and that the illocutionary point of any performance of Communicative Blame is to inspire remorse in the wrongdoer, where remorse is understood as a pained moral perception of the wrong one has done.⁴ This remorse effects an increased alignment of the wrongdoer’s moral understanding with that of the blamer, and further—according to a certain ‘proleptic mechanism’ of blame I develop from some brief but suggestive comments by Bernard Williams—an increased alignment too of their motivationally live moral reasons. I offer these twin alignments in moral consciousness as my positive answer to the title question, What’s the point of blame? They also provide the basis for a vindictory explanation of the role that blame plays in our lives, by revealing Communicative Blame as essential to the interpersonal normative energy that perpetually regenerates and develops shared moral consciousness. In section 4 I shall argue that other forms of blame can be explained as derivative from Communicative Blame by reference to the fact that they display an essential residue of its point,

displaying it in different, more imaginatively displaced and socially ramified forms. Finally, in section 5 I raise a new worry about blame—a quasi-political worry that only comes into view in the light of the preceding analysis of the point and purpose of Communicative Blame.

If successful, my paradigm based strategy will deliver a unified, explanatorily and normatively satisfying account of our diverse practices of blame—one that is capable of making explicit how the different practices are explanatorily related to one another, and which furthermore amounts to a vindication of some, though not all, kinds of blame. Which is what one should hope for. On a fleetingly therapeutic note, I also hope that scrutinizing blame through the lens of Communicative Blame might enable us, in any given encounter with blameworthy conduct, more easily to ask ourselves, Is there any point in communicating blame here? for sometimes the answer may well be No. And in finding that this really is the answer, we may experience some release from the accusatory stance that can cause a habit of fault-finding to spread itself more widely in our moral consciousness than is either necessary or good for us.

1. Pathologies of Blame

Why does blame have a bad name? David Owens makes the point that ‘Much reflection on blame starts from the premise that blame is problematic because it entails a wounding judgement, hard feelings, a punitive reaction, or some combination of these’ (Owens 2012, p. 25).⁵ Perhaps this is simply because there are indeed socially prominent styles of blame that are bad. Those, for instance, that spring from a censorious habit of finding fault, or from projected guilt or shame, from moralistic high-mindedness, naked vengeful drive, or the simple cruelty of seeking satisfaction from making someone feel bad.⁶ Like most things in life, our practice of blame is susceptible to the vices of being done from the wrong sort of motive, in the wrong degree, in the wrong way, or with the wrong sort of object. These ways in which blame can be done badly are worth a brief

(and highly selective) review as they may help explain why blame retains, in some quarters at least, something of a bad reputation.⁷

It will be simplest to describe these pathologies of blame in terms of the positive conditions on appropriate blame which they reveal by implication. First, the blamed party must be *blameworthy*, where this crucially involves the requirement that the moral expectations on her not be unreasonably demanding. They must be *reasonable expectations* in at least three dimensions: (i) practically, (ii) epistemically, and (iii) moral-epistemically. That is, the agent could reasonably be expected to have *acted* in the required way; she could reasonably be expected to have *grasped the facts* bearing on the practical situation; and she could reasonably be expected to have *understood the moral significance* of her behaviour. Regarding (i), for instance, it would not be appropriate to blame someone for failing to do something supererogatory, for no one can be blameworthy for failing to be a moral hero. Regarding (ii), it would not be appropriate to blame someone for behaviour premised on a non-culpable misapprehension of the facts. And similarly regarding (iii), nor would it be appropriate to blame them for failing to grasp the moral significance of a given way of behaving if the requisite moral-epistemic resources were simply not culturally-historically available to them.⁸ These three aspects of reasonable expectations help steer our practice of blame clear of the moralism of excessive demand.

Second, blame must of course be proportionate to the wrongdoing, for it is the degree of wrongdoing that justifies the degree of blame. It is not appropriate to be maximally censorious in respect of a small misdemeanour, though the typical scenario of blame (where the blamer is hurt) means it may often be tempting to allow oneself to do just that. We might say it is in the very nature of blame, as a response to moral wounding, that we risk going in for excess. However, given the power relations that may often hold between wrongdoer and wronged parties, it is worth saying with equal emphasis that nor is it appropriate to fail to properly register a significant wrong. To blame is not only to condemn but also thereby to

demand respect, which is why it is as disproportionate to be a doormat as it is to be a moral tyrant.

Third, blame should be appropriately contained in its proper remit, both temporally and in terms of the relationship(s) it affects. This means that blame's expression should not be allowed to go on too long, and should not be allowed to migrate into regions of the relationship where it does not belong, or indeed to wantonly damage other relationships into the bargain. Blame should be allowed neither to fester nor to spread. If it does, it will have degenerated into *ressentiment*—which may express itself as a vice of excess in respect of intensity, duration, or social extent.

Fourth, blame must be expressed in the proper ethical register. If someone does something morally bad from a motive that is superficial and fleeting in their psychology (a one-off catty comment), yet one blames them as if the malevolent motive were a deep and lasting character trait of theirs, then one is blaming in cynical mode—one is thinking excessively ill of another's character. The need to avoid this, and our tendency towards it, is particularly noticeable in parental blame towards children. It is bad parenting, for instance, to construct an older sibling's occasionally hateful feelings towards their younger sibling as if these feelings reflected a hateful character; and yet one's own upset combined with the need to discipline them can lead one to precisely this kind of moralistic exaggeration ('You hateful child!'). This is not only unfair to the older sibling, but runs the risk of actively constructing their motives in a way that has causal power—there is nothing more likely to make a child's fleeting hateful feelings congeal into something more stable than this kind of ill-pitched personal criticism from a parent. (I shall return to the more general causal constructive power of blame in section 3.)

Fifth, blame must be properly geared to people's entitlement to take some risks in learning how to do things for themselves and make their own mistakes. We set others up for a fall if we anticipate how their actions may go awry and then blame them when they do, with or without an explicit 'I told you so'. There are

many sorts of thing that can go wrong in life (intellectual, practical, emotional, moral) which are somewhat underdetermined as regards how far they should be interpreted as someone's fault or as simply an unfortunate playing out of endemic risk. For such cases we have some latitude of choice as to how we construe them. But one way of prescriptively setting the stage for the fault-finding construal is to forewarn excessively, to point out the endemic risks in advance so that if the thing does go wrong there is a ready made construal that works retrospectively to cast the agent as having been at fault ('I told you to be careful!'). Someone who does this is in the moralistic habit of setting others up for a fall. The habit belongs to a controlling and censorious attitude towards others that issues in an over-use of blame, for generally speaking one is surely entitled to expect a somewhat freer experimental space. At its worst it can be a kind of moral bullying, though like other controlling behaviours it may often be born more of anxiety than of any simple will to dominate.

Sixth, blame is inappropriate when it is applied in cases that exhibit a certain kind of 'incident' or outcome moral luck—the kind that involves what we might call a *no-fault moral responsibility*. In Bernard Williams' canonical example, a responsible lorry driver is driving carefully yet, through tragic bad luck, runs over a child. Here there is, precisely, no fault, and so no appropriate blame; and yet (Williams argues) there is a terrible moral burden that must be borne in knowing '*I did this*'—a burden of responsibility he termed 'agent regret'.⁹ That the pained acknowledgement of one's agential relation to the tragic event might typically call for efforts to make amends where possible (or, where that is not possible, to find some symbolic way of owning and honouring the gravity of what one has done) is indicative of the fact that the pain is a properly *moral* response, and not merely an understandable kind of pained but non-moral regret that might be experienced in essentially the same form by a bystander. What such examples vividly illustrate for all parties (regardless of one's view of moral luck) is that blame is out of order when one does bad things through no fault of one's own. If no fault, then no appropriate blame.

Drawing these examples of everyday pathologies of blame together, we can see that they indicate the need to contain and focus blame so that our tendency, especially when hurt or outraged, to overdo blame in various dimensions is kept in check. When we go in for blame, it needs to be done to the right degree, in the right manner and register, and in relation to appropriate kinds of fault in the wrongdoer; but what our selective review of these common pathologies reminds us is that blame is particularly susceptible to overreaching itself in all these ways, not only owing to the fact that we do it as a response to wrongdoing, but also because it is a technique of control. The resultant conditions on appropriate blame also loosely indicate a minimal definition of blame as essentially incorporating a kind of judgement: *a finding fault with someone for their (inward or outward) conduct*. I suspect if one were required to offer a definition, this would have to be it—the highest common denominator of all possible cases of blame.

Some will disagree because they think blame *always* involves a negative moral emotion; but this is not so, for there are many cases of what we naturally call blame where there is nothing more than a non-emotional judgement of fault (excepting that perhaps any moral perception may be said to incorporate at least a trace emotion).¹⁰ Indeed the sort of case I have in mind is entirely normal. If I am listening to the news with a friend, and we hear that certain pay negotiations in France have failed so that the French lorry drivers are likely to go out on strike, my friend might say he blames French union leaders for driving too hard a bargain, while I may blame the management for being too inflexible. But neither of us need have any emotional investment whatever in these matters, so that the blame has no emotional charge even while each of us is certainly finding fault and, as we say, ‘pointing the finger’. Blame is a proper part of any fault-finding moral interpretation (and of any other kind of interpretation that incorporates it—think of the interpretive aspect of history), so it is no surprise that moral understanding frequently calls upon us to find fault with agents in circumstances about which we find ourselves entirely dispassionate.

Those who favour a definition on which blame necessarily involves some emotional charge will want to insist that such dispassionate fault-findings are not quite blame, but rather mere judgements of blameworthiness.¹¹ Certainly it is possible to carve up the concepts that way. But any observations we might make of supposed mere judgements of blameworthiness are in themselves entirely neutral as to whether they should be described as examples of judgements of blameworthiness without (something called) *blame* being present, or whether instead we say, more simply, that there can be forms of blame that lack emotion, for instance because the blamer is at a dispassionate distance. My wager—and by the end of this paper we shall see whether it has paid off—is that the proper way to acknowledge the place of emotion is to locate it in our basic paradigm of blame, thereby crediting it as blame’s first impetus but without forcing us to conserve it artificially as a necessary condition of the mature and internally diversified practice of blame we hope to explain—something to which the many everyday cases of dispassionate blame give the lie.

Let me now turn to the business of characterising my proposed paradigm form of blame—that which I shall argue displays blame’s most basic point and purpose. Its natural label is ‘Communicative Blame’.

2. Communicative Blame and the Alignment of Moral Understandings

My proposed paradigm form of blame is Communicative Blame—blame that is performed in the most simple and socially immediate sort of interpersonal exchange: I wrong you, and in response you let me know with feeling that I am at fault for it. It is an essentially second-personal, I-Thou interaction. The communication of blame need not be verbal of course; it may be gestural or otherwise behavioural (maybe the wronged party pointedly falls silent, or leaves the room). There can be non-verbal communication, so there can be non-verbal Communicative Blame. What is characteristic, and so distinguishes it from other kinds of reaction to wrongdoing such as plain hurt or sorrow, or shock or bewilderment at being ill-treated, is that in Communicative Blame the blamer

accuses the wrongdoer of fault. This fault might concern an action or omission, or it might be a matter of the blamed party's motives, attitudes, dispositions, or indeed their beliefs (we blame people for the doxastic aspects of racism just as we blame them for whatever motivation may be driving it), and we blame them whether the inner element is explicitly realised in action or not. Human beings' possible dimensions of moral fault are many, and in Communicative Blame we may take issue with any of them.

Let us focus on an example. You come home from a weekend away to discover that your neighbours have neglected to walk your dog despite having promised to take care of him while you were away. Naturally you may communicate blame to them. This might be explicit or implied, fulsome or partially suppressed. It might be angry, or shocked, hurt, bewildered...¹² You may say something direct along the lines of 'How could you neglect him like that? You said you were happy to take care of him!'; alternatively you might freeze them out, refusing to have further neighbourly relations with them. You may be justified in being seriously angry with them, but sensing that the communication will go better if you tone down the emotional intensity somewhat, you instinctively soften your accusation, better to bring home your point. But whatever tone you take (intense or mild), and in whatever negative emotional register it is delivered (anger, disapproval, sorrow, disappointment, disbelief, outrage...), in Communicative Blame you are *finding fault with the other party, communicating this judgement of fault to them with the added force of some negative emotional charge.*

Now, in order to uncover the point and purpose of this practice of blame, we should ask by what sort of speech act Communicative Blame gains verbal expression. It is clearly one among the broad category of illocutionary speech acts, whose distinctive feature is that they cannot be fully successfully performed without the uptake of the hearer—that is, without the hearer recognizing the speaker's intention to perform just that speech act.¹³ In the familiar example of *warning*, for instance, one cannot fully successfully warn someone that the unstirred hot chocolate from the microwave might burn her tongue unless she recognises your intention so to warn her. If she does not realise it is her you are

addressing, or if she thinks you're quoting a favourite line from a movie, or just making a joke, then you cannot fully successfully warn her, even while you may have done everything you could possibly be expected to do in order to achieve that communicative end. You may have discharged all your linguistic responsibilities on this score, yet still the lack of uptake prevents you from bringing off the illocutionary speech act with full success. A great many speech acts have this form—warning, telling, consenting, refusing, and, as I am now suggesting, communicative blaming. By examining the mechanism of Communicative Blame considered as an illocution I hope to uncover its point.

Regarding any illocutionary act, we may seek to understand it better by asking, What is its illocutionary point? C. A. J. Coady, for instance, in his seminal treatment of testimony, asks this of the speech act of testifying, and answers that its particular illocutionary point is to offer evidence from a position of relative authority to someone who wants to know. Providing evidence is the distinctive way that testimony fulfils a broader illocutionary point that is shared with other assertoric speech acts such as objecting or arguing—namely that of informing one's interlocutor of something.¹⁴ What, then, is the illocutionary point of Communicative Blame? What is the illocutionary point of accusing one's neighbours of fault in the manner I described? Is it simply to convey a piece of moral information? I think not. Is it simply to make them feel bad? Again, no; though it is certainly true that Communicative Blame does aim at making the blamee feel bad. So let me try to state more precisely how it aims to do this: Communicative Blame aims to make the wrongdoer feel *sorry for what they have done*. Not merely sorry that they did it—which is a feeling they might have for purely instrumental reasons ('I wish I'd bothered to walk their dog—*now* they're refusing to water our plants'). The illocutionary point of Communicative Blame is, rather, to inspire that admixture of judgement and moral emotion that is *remorse*.¹⁵ It aims to bring the wrongdoer to see or fully acknowledge the moral significance of what they have done or failed to do. This aim need not of course be present as an intention in the psychology of the communicative blamer; rather the aim is a function of the type of speech act it is, the nature of its illocutionary point.

When people blame us in this or that style they might of course be trying to make us feel bad in some other way, but in Communicative Blame the speech act is geared specifically to bring us to feel the proper pang of remorse, where remorse is understood as a cognitively charged moral emotion—a moral perception that delivers a pained understanding of the moral wrong we have done.¹⁶ Such remorse may therefore be painful indeed, depending on what it is one has done. Communicative Blame has this structure too: a cognitively loaded moral emotion, this time a perception of a wrong one suffers at the hands of another. On this picture of things, we see Communicative Blame and remorse as partner emotional cognitions, each bearing the same moral content (X wronged Y) but where the content is grasped from the opposite points of view of wronged and wrongdoer, each of whom apprehends this content in a way that is infused with a perspectively appropriate moral emotion. By way of this moral psychological calibration these two essential moral emotions—first blame and then remorse—work together to bring increased alignment between the moral understandings of blamer and wrongdoer. This reveals the first aspect of the point of Communicative Blame—the increased alignment of moral understandings.

This increased alignment will properly be achieved dialogically. In virtue of the fact that Communicative Blame's purpose is to jump-start the uncomprehending and/or uncaring wrongdoer's moral understanding, its proper form is *reasoning with emotional force*. This means that while the initial impulse towards increased alignment of moral understanding must be the wronged party's attempt to jolt the wrongdoer into seeing things more from their perspective ('What you said was disloyal—you're my closest friend, you are supposed to be on my side') still there may well be defensive counter claims from the alleged wrongdoer that prompt a major re-think ('Don't be so pompous—I'm entitled to voice my own opinions'). Thus the blamed party may not, as it turns out, budge his moral understanding an inch, and may even persuade the blamer she was making a mountain out of a molehill.¹⁷ Either way, however, an increased alignment of moral understanding is produced; and we may add that Communicative Blame may be said to have at least partially achieved its point even in cases where little

more than the beginnings of a reassessment of one's conduct is achieved. We may comprehend the point of blame through the lens of an ideal of converging moral understandings, while acknowledging of course that moral conflict is often too difficult and fraught for this kind of convergence to be possible.

Continuing to explore Communicative Blame as an illocutionary speech act, we may also ask what its typical perlocutionary point will be in any given case. The answer is manifest: the perlocutionary point of Communicative Blame is to prompt a change for the better in the behaviour (inner and outer) of the wrongdoer. You want your neighbours to feel sorry *with a view to* their coming to see things differently and mend their ways. Communicative Blame will be well designed to effect this practical aim insofar as the pained awareness that is remorse, brought about by the blamer's expression of hurt, is likely to prompt the desired change in the wrongdoer. Now how far this is likely to actually work on irresponsible dog-entrusted neighbours simply depends on the individuals concerned—naturally there can be hard cases. But it surely works much of the time for non-hard cases, very often pre-emptively—the prospect of being on the receiving end of Communicative Blame is part of what keeps our behaviour in check. But whether pre-emptive or actual, Communicative Blame in one or another form is an entirely everyday mechanism by which we hold each other accountable. We don't like being blamed, being found fault with, and especially not if that means being on the receiving end of some emotional flak, whether of the heated or chilly sort. If we do come to see our behaviour as the blamer calls us to, then someone of ordinarily good conscience will feel sorry, and perhaps change herself at least a little.¹⁸ So long as the hard cases are indeed the exception to the general rule, it will make sense to maintain that the aim of Communicative Blame is to bring the wrongdoer to grasp in remorse the full significance of her behaviour with a view to prompting a change.

Were it ever to come to empirical light that there is a significantly broad range of everyday cases in which even the gentler, more explanatory, forms of Communicative Blame are likely only to create further resentment, and/or entrench the wrongful behaviour, then this would be a matter of discovering that

in such cases the proper point of Communicative Blame might be better achieved by a further softened, perhaps indirect stance towards the wrongdoer—for instance by taking all the accusation out of the communication and ascending to the second order so as to communicate instead a *report* of how the wrongful behaviour affected one. Such an altered stance is at one remove from that of blame, but in some cases it may have a better prospect of inspiring the requisite remorse and motivational change in the wrongdoer. This therapeutic possibility is an invaluable resource for those situations in which the normal mechanisms have stopped working, so that communicating blame has become for whatever reason—be it personality disorder, or plain deterioration of relationship—a dead-end.¹⁹

I have so far argued that the point of Communicative Blame is to bring increased alignment of the moral understandings of wronged and wrongdoer. By demanding that the wrongdoer take full account of the moral significance of what she has done, the blamer is going in for a speech act whose aim is to bring about an enlargement of the wrongdoer's moral awareness to include the perspective of the wronged party. By focussing on the interpersonal mechanism of Communicative Blame in its everyday functional mode, and by reference to its transformative illocutionary and perlocutionary points, I hope to have shown that blame need not, and does not basically, express any unworthy impetus such as vengeful retributive drive, moralistic high-mindedness, or anxious control freakery; but is rather fuelled by a transformative moral-epistemic energy towards shared moral sensibility, along with a candidly disciplinary hope. It is a communicative act that reprimands with feeling, in the hope of bringing the wrongdoer to better understand and perhaps correct her behaviour. Which is fair enough.

More than this, however, the portrait of blame as basically communicative that we now have before us helps explain the six pathologies of blame reviewed in section 1.²⁰ The aim of inspiring in the wrongdoer a remorseful understanding of the full significance of what she has done is not going to be well served by any kind of blame which is misdirected, disproportionate, insufficiently focussed,

wrongly pitched, controlling, or applied where the bad thing done was owing to bad luck rather than any fault. Briefly touching again on each pathology in turn, we may summarize as follows. Communicative Blame will fail to fulfil its aim: (i) if it is directed at the non-blameworthy—for their correct understanding of what they have done could not amount to remorse; or (ii) if it is disproportionately strong—for that is likely to inspire only resistance; or again disproportionately weak—for that is unlikely to keep the wrongdoer in check; or (iii) if it is not sufficiently confined to its proper remit—for *ressentiment* will only aggravate; or (iv) if it responds to a superficial or fleeting fault as if it were a deep flaw in character—which cynical register is not apt to inspire the proper pitch of remorse; or (v) if it voraciously applies itself too widely, seeking moral control over all sorts of actions that would be better left free from the advance construction of conditional fault; or, finally (vi) if it is applied in cases of no-fault moral bad luck, for where there is no fault, there is no indicated need for an enlargement of moral understanding. Thus we see that viewing blame in general through the lens of Communicative Blame in particular enables us to see what is wrong with many of the forms of blame we naturally regard as inappropriate: they could not serve its proper point.

The picture of blame that has now emerged is of a practice that is fundamentally aimed at promoting greater alignment between the moral understandings of the blamer and the blamee by enlarging the moral awareness of the wrongdoer. But next we must acknowledge that this is not a stand-alone purpose, for our moral understandings affect the reasons that govern our behaviour. Closely related, then, is the increased alignment of the moral reasons that motivate us. To show this, I will now go on to develop some remarks of Bernard Williams regarding how blame can sometimes function as a ‘proleptic mechanism’.

3. Communicative Blame As Aligning Moral Reasons

When the wrongdoer is someone whose fault (whether at the level of action, motive or attitude) is already blameworthy by their own lights, he is likely to be

quick with a remorseful response, for in his better judgement he already sees things in the light cast by the wronged party's position. But we must ask how can Communicative Blame ever achieve its illocutionary point of inspiring remorse in cases where the wrongdoer is not like that, but rather recognizes no existing reason to have acted differently. This will obviously be the harder sort of case, yet human nature being what it is, it may be a common case. I believe that Williams offers us the beginnings of what we need to answer this question. In short, he suggests that sometimes blame may function as a 'proleptic mechanism'.

Let me reconstruct the mechanism using more theoretically neutral terms than Williams' own, which are specific to his view of practical reasons as 'internal'. Exploiting the envisaged proleptic mechanism involves treating the blamed party *as if* they recognised the motivating reason when in fact they didn't (or at least they failed to give it appropriate deliberative priority). Treating them in this as-if manner stands to gain some psychological traction in the as yet recalcitrant wrongdoer, *provided that they possess a more general motive to be the sort of person that you respect*. If they are thus susceptible to your admonitions at this baseline level, then the blame communicated may gain some psychological purchase. That is, the latter motive on their part has the result that your expression of blame affects them somewhat (perhaps they start to feel a little sorry, or at least to question what they have done), so that in some measure they are brought nearer to recognizing the reason which formerly failed to weigh with them appropriately.²¹

This idea that blame may function proleptically, by exploiting the effect that a blamer's admonitions may have on the psychology of the wrongdoer, supports the intrinsically interpersonal conception of blame that is embedded in Communicative Blame: you wrong me (or someone else I care about), and I let you know, with feeling, that you were at fault. What I am doing when I blame you communicatively in this way is *either* reminding you of a reason whose force you already recognized but failed to be appropriately swayed by; *or* alternatively (the proleptic possibility), in the event that you did not recognize the reason, I

nonetheless treat you *as if* you did, where the negative attitude I therein direct at you may *bring* you to recognize the reason in some measure.

It seems to me that the only possible medium for a proleptic mechanism is Communicative Blame, because the action of the mechanism is, precisely, a second-personal communication of fault backed up by the force of some reproving emotion—the two distinctive elements of Communicative Blame.²² What the proleptic possibility effectively reveals (but which Williams does not bring out, for his interests lie elsewhere) is that when blame functions proleptically, as we can now see only Communicative Blame is able, it exhibits a *social constructive power* by which the object of any such communication has pressure exerted on her to move towards shared reasons. The blamer cares about gaining the acknowledgement she feels was withheld from her; while the blamed party (if the blame communicated is to achieve its illocutionary point) cares in some more general way about the esteem of the blamer,²³ with the result that the accusation of fault might be sufficient to bring a change of reasons. Here we revisit another key distinctive feature of Communicative Blame, that it is not merely expressive (as if one simply needed to get the resentment off one's chest) but rather transformative: the illocutionary point is to bring the wrongdoer to remorse for what they have done, so that they come to be appropriately moved by new, shared reasons incorporating the point of view of the wronged party. Communicative Blame thereby has a social constructive power of the causal kind: it can actually cause others to come to have certain features by treating them as if they had those features. This is a powerful mechanism, and with more or less success, it functions as a perpetual (re)generator of shared moral reasons. Communicative Blame, then, functions as an invaluable interpersonal calibrator in moral agency.

This wraps up my argument for the second aspect of Communicative Blame's point: we have now seen not only that it aims at increased alignment of moral understanding, but also of moral reasons. This, I take it, also shows that at least our paradigm of blame is not an expression of anything bad, but rather aims at bringing the wrongdoer to see things in part from the wronged party's point of

view, thereby enlarging her perception and altering her reasons. The task that remains is to investigate how far this paradigm of blame can substantiate the proposal I ventured at the outset, namely, that Communicative Blame is explanatorily prior to other significant practices of blame that we might also hope to share in the vindication. Let us therefore look and see how far other forms of blame may be satisfyingly explained as derivative from our paradigm form.

4. The Explanatory Priority of Communicative Blame

I have elaborated on Communicative Blame as a paradigm form of the practice—the form that is spontaneously displayed in the most simple and natural kind of blame-like exchange. It is our candidate for the explanatorily basic form of blame. Having extrapolated the different aspects of its point and purpose, I hope we are now in a position to see how other forms of blame would naturally grow from it. First let me consider first-personal blame—self-blame. Self-blame is already indicated at the heart of the successful second-personal interaction, inasmuch as remorse entails self-blame.²⁴ The remorseful wrongdoer must inevitably see herself as blameworthy. Communicative Blame, therefore, gives immediate rise to the reflexive phenomenon of self-blame. Indeed it is fitting to speculate that this is the primary setting in which we learn to hold ourselves responsible for our actions: through the discipline of others communicating their blame regarding what we have done.

Next, and building up from Communicative Blame first considered as a simple exchange of moral reactive attitudes: as we increase the complexity of the social and moral relations in which we imagine blame taking place, we should expect there to be some derived practices in which certain elements fall away or new elements enter in. Regarding the social side of things, there are clearly more kinds of relationship for the moral subject to stand in than the second-personal, so that reactions of blame will naturally extend themselves to apply in third-personal cases too, both nearby and very distant. But when we express blame at

a distance without any second-personal communicative purpose, as we do for instance in the example of the impending French lorry driver strike, all the distinctive elements of the transformative purpose I have been at pains to attribute to Communicative Blame have fallen away—neither the second-personal perspective nor the aim to inspire remorse through the emotionally charged accusation of fault is any longer present: In whom am I trying to inspire remorse as miles from the scene I chat casually about which party I blame? No one. With whom am I upset? No one. Whom am I addressing? Not the wrongdoer, for sure.

In such cases of dispassionate third-personal blame, which may be the bare judgement that the agent was at fault, there seems at first to be little connection with Communicative Blame. If it can be shown, however, that even in such cases as these there remains a significant residue of the basic communicative purpose, then that residue would indicate a derivative relation to our paradigm. I believe we can indeed detect in our French lorry drivers case such a residue of the transformative purpose of Communicative Blame, and this residue can be made out in relation to all three aspects that seem to have gone missing: the second-personal perspective, the emotional content, and the illocutionary point.

Let us address the loss of the second-personal aspect in combination with the loss of the emotional charge, for these aspects are interconnected. If at a distance I dispassionately blame the management for inflexibility in the pay negotiations, then my judgement of blame is essentially a vicarious application of the morally resentful accusation of fault that I consider the lorry drivers would be entitled to make for themselves in a performance of Communicative Blame addressed to their paymasters. In this sense the point of even such a distant third-personal application of blame is explained as derivative from the basic case of Communicative Blame. Simply put, the originally emotionally charged moral interpretation of fault comes to be applied vicariously to a case in which one has no emotional investment. Such vicarious expressions of Communicative Blame quickly become second nature to us—they may even come to dominate our sense of the moral, so that we prioritize the impersonal form in our moral

imagination. This is not remotely surprising, for the moral reactive attitudes are in any case *essentially* vicarious, that is, essentially applicable to third parties, essentially capable, that is, of impersonal form.²⁵ What we perhaps first learn interpersonally is moral accountability of an essentially generalizable kind.

Regarding the lost illocutionary point of Communicative Blame, I think we can detect that in residual form too. My expressed judgement of blame towards the French management is manifestly destined to have zero influence on them, not least since I am in no communicative relations with them. But still it might have some influence on others' moral understanding, notably on that of my interlocutor who currently sees the pattern of culpability differently (recall that he blames the union leaders). My expression of blame cannot of course be constructed as aiming to inspire remorse in anybody (there is no one in earshot who should feel anything like it), but the aim of bringing others' moral understanding into alignment with our own does nonetheless seem to be present here in another form. My expression of blame can be seen as aiming to bring my friend to see this new spat in continental industrial relations more as I see it, and so align his moral understanding more with mine. As before we should note, however, that the reasoned form of Communicative Blame means that the reverse alignment may result: while any kind of communicated blame must, as a matter of subjective inevitability, aim in the first instance to persuade the other of one's own moral point of view, this is never more than the opening gambit in an exchange whose resting place may be closer to the reverse alignment. By the end of the conversation I may have come to see that it is I who have been misconstruing the moral landscape. Accusations of blame, whether second- or third-personal, emotionally charged or dispassionate, initiate a moral conversation of a kind designed to shift different moral understandings into increased alignment, whether that conversation is with the wrongdoer herself (as in the case of Communicative Blame) or with some third party (as in the conversation about the distant French lorry drivers).

In scenarios such as the one in which I blame the management but my friend blames the union leaders, what has replaced the attempt to bring specifically the

wrongdoer to see things more from my point of view is an attempt to achieve an alignment of moral understanding with a more socially ramified remit—a wider conversation. In effect, our general practice of discussing patterns of culpability is a practice through which we continue to affirm, rehearse, test out, and possibly modify our moral understandings, whether or not the wrongdoer is being addressed, or is anywhere in the vicinity. Going in for debating or sharing moral interpretations of different scenarios, however distant, is itself an important part of sustaining an indefinitely contested set of shared moral understandings.²⁶ What we can see thinly veiled in such examples apparently so different from Communicative Blame, then, is in fact a socially ramified and generalised form of Communicative Blame's illocutionary point: instead of the I-thou attempt to bring the wrongdoer to see things more from our point of view, we find rather the attempt to affirm or test out our own moral understanding more generally in exchanges with others in our moral community. In both cases our first aim is inevitably to bring our interlocutor to see things more our way, but equally in both cases it is an open question whether the negotiated outcome might bring a different change of view.

Finally, what if my blame is not expressed at all, so that our example becomes one of silent blame (what Sher calls 'private blame') and the communicative aspect goes missing in its entirety? Perhaps I am listening to the news of the French lorry drivers and I think the blaming thought (I find fault) without expressing it in any way at all. This possibility too can readily be accommodated, for it is a straightforward feature of communicative acts in general—telling, warning, arguing etc.—that they can be withheld, kept private. There might be many reasons to withhold Communicative Blame: one might be afraid of the response, one might know the communication would be pointless because the wrongdoer will never understand, one might judge that it would do more harm than good, or, more dramatically, maybe the wrong is so serious that you simply want no more to do with her. Non-communicated blame is therefore readily understood as derivative of Communicative Blame in just this simple way: sometimes it is better all things considered *not* to communicate a judgement

even while it is of a type that is best understood as essentially apt for communication.

This thought situates blame in the context of the real costs and risks of communicating it, and we might extend the thought by emphasizing that my purpose has been to vindicate appropriate forms of blame, but not to reveal any kind of blame as compulsory. (Even the norm of blame, discussed in section 1, to the effect that one should not be a doormat still leaves many opportunities for choosing to refrain from non-inappropriate blame.) It is not only that on any given occasion we might judge that it is, for one or another reason, not worth communicating it; there is the broader possibility that in many of our personal relations we might prefer to not to 'go there' at all, not even in judgement. Some partial withdrawal from the moral-interpretive practice of finding fault might represent a welcome respite from the moral fray, so that instead of staying permanently alert to patterns of culpability, one can sometimes adopt a more accepting and more passive stance according to which one might simply observe that people do the things they do—often things it is deeply in their nature to do—and that whatever we may make of these actions, we are not compelled to mobilise our interpersonal moral attitudes in relation to them.

There is surely room for this stance in life, not least because of the latitude of choice that exists as regards how much free experimental space (as I put it earlier) we afford each other without constructions of culpability being applied. Succeeding in exercising choice in how much and in what spirit we blame each other for this or that is an important exercise of freedom as regards the particular form that our modes of accountability take. Importantly, there is room for this within the broadly naturalistic approach taken in this essay, for while the reactive attitudes are rightly seen as humanly basic (it is in our nature to blame each other interpersonally in some way or other), still their precise form and remit allow some significant cultural-historical contingency, and they are therefore something for which we can take a certain responsibility. There are other powerful constraints besides human nature of course, if comparatively contingent ones. Our social institutions will tend to impose their own

constraints. It is surely very hard to imagine, for instance, a desirable withdrawal from practices of blame on a grand societal scale—that would seem a particularly bad idea in relation to political institutions.²⁷ Nonetheless, diminishing the habit of fault-finding in one’s personal life can clearly be an intelligible aim that might make for a better, happier, more open-spirited experience of the world and the people we encounter in it. It might release one from certain stultifying habits of judging others, and indeed oneself, from which it might be worth being released. As with so many of our practices, we gain increased autonomy once we locate the border between that which is humanly necessary—some generic interpersonal practice of blame played out at the level of reactive attitudes—from that which is contingent—a specific style of blame, with a specific practical remit, and a particular moral meaning created by its relation to other values making the shared moral life.

5. A New Worry About Blame—Social Constructive Power Revisited

I have offered a vindication of blame in general by derivation from a vindication of Communicative Blame in particular—a paradigm form, which I have argued to be explanatorily basic. This paradigm form has the invaluable constructive aim of enlarging the wrongdoer’s moral understanding and motivational reasons by way of remorse, which guarantees a proper grasp of the perspective of the wronged party. I believe this shows that many of the standard worries about blame—that it is fundamentally expressive of an undignified appetite for vengeance, or various kinds of irritating moralism—are unfounded. Such motives are properly understood as pathologies of blame, and do not undermine appropriate blame. However, what is revealed by elaborating the point of Communicative Blame in this way is that blame is among other things a technique of control, and the candid will to power that drives the desire to make the wrongdoer remorseful for what she has done has been revealed as having a significant social constructive potential. I have so far billed that as a morally-socially productive phenomenon, and one hopes that on the whole it is, especially given the reasoned form of Communicative Blame. But on the other

hand, many a morally outrageous conclusion has been arrived at in the form of reasoned argumentation, whether spiked with emotion or not, and so the fact that Communicative Blame is reasoned in form brings no guarantee that its constructive power will be used to promote a good end. This brings to light a whole new reason to be suspicious of blame, a quasi-political reason. It is not that the *very idea* of control should worry us. It is good that the underdog can gain some control; it is good that people who are wronged may use the power of emotionally charged words to demand respect and change, and in some cases even to precipitate an advance in shared moral consciousness by urging innovative moral interpretations on others. What has emerged as troubling instead, however, is the contingency of who is doing the controlling, how effective their attempts at influencing others' thinking may be, and just what that moral thinking is like.

In short, Communicative Blame has emerged as a power that needs to be in the right hands. In the wrong hands it may generate bogus moral reasons that motivate people against their proper interests and actively promote a morally corrupt outlook. The religious fundamentalist patriarch who firmly believes his daughters should not be educated is someone who may well be in a position to exercise Communicative Blame in its full social constructive capacity in relation to a daughter who wants an education. So long as she has even a basic disposition to care about his admonitions he will have some constructive power over her motivating reasons which is morally regressive, indeed oppressive. Thus while Communicative Blame may function for the good, it may also function as a significant arm of oppression. In short, whether blame promotes good or ill is troublingly contingent. It may be that other things equal a practice of Communicative Blame will tend towards the good, insofar as it enables people to come out with what they think and feel about how they are treated, and insofar as it solicits open discussion. But of course things are often not equal, for not only may the relevant relationships and forums for discussion be structured by inequality, the available moral interpretations that people have to work with may themselves have been shaped by prior practices of Communicative Blame,

practices which might, for instance, have persuaded people that the likes of them are not due an education.

The final word in this otherwise vindictory account, then, must be a caution about the power of Communicative Blame to achieve its transformative point, and of the derivative styles of blame to rework that same purpose in impersonal and socially ramified forms. Ultimately, it seems that the good purpose of aligning our forms of moral understanding so that they incorporate the point of view of those who are wronged must be held in balance with the on-going risk that it is rather the moral outlook of the fanatic, the corrupt, the bully, or the morally misguided that may gain the ascendancy. Our portrait of blame has painted it a moral species of social power, and we can now see that it has the ambivalent countenance one should expect from a subject of that sort, for such a power may be used for good or ill.²⁸

¹ Relevant examples of such genealogical explanations—one of the concept of knowledge, the other of the virtue of truthfulness—are put forward respectively by Edward Craig in *Knowledge and the State of Nature: An Essay in Conceptual Synthesis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) and Bernard Williams in *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

² Strawson, P. F. (1974) 'Freedom and Resentment', in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*, London: Methuen.

³ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (2001) *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell; ff. §§65-71.

⁴ In this I borrow from Raimond Gaita's conception of remorse as 'a pained, bewildered or...incredulous—realisation of the full meaning of what one has done' (Gaita, Raimond. (2004) *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, London: Routledge; p. xxi; see also ch. 4. However, for my own purposes, were we to define *shame* so that it encapsulated the same moral perception or understanding, albeit under a differently focused moral emotion, that would merely supplement my account, for the claim is that Communicative Blame aims to inspire a full grasp of the moral significance of what one has done. If that can come in more than one moral-emotional form, so much the better. Our understanding of Communicative Blame should be such that it aims to inspire any emotional form of the requisite moral understanding.

⁵Owens, David. (2012) *Shaping the Normative Landscape* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁶ Annette Baier considers the comparative question how far Humean and Kantian conceptions of the enforcement of morality may involve cruelty (enforcement being in part through blame, though also 'blame by punishment',

and by other mechanisms such as disdain or derision). See Baier, Annette. (1993) 'Moralism and Cruelty: Reflections on Hume and Kant', *Ethics* Vol. 103, No., pp. 436-57.

⁷ Blame's bad name has however led to substantial philosophical defences, notably by George Sher, *In Praise of Blame* (2006) Oxford: Oxford University Press, and by Tim Scanlon in his *Moral Dimensions* (2008) Camb. MA: Harvard.

⁸ Elsewhere I have explained this phenomenon of non-culpable moral ignorance in terms of someone's not being 'structurally'—i.e. culturally-historically—in a position to grasp the moral significance of their conduct. See section II of 'The Relativism of Blame and Williams's Relativism of Distance', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supp. Vol. LXXXIV* (2010), pp. 151-77.

⁹ Williams, Bernard. (1981) 'Moral Luck' essay 2 in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰ In this I disagree with George Sher, who defines blame as requiring a desire that the blamed party had not acted badly or had the bad disposition (Sher, George. (2006) *In Praise of Blame* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); and with David Owens, who argues that blame always involves anger of some kind (Owens, David. (2012) ch. 1).

¹¹ Sher defines blame as involving a belief-desire pair: 'a pair whose components are, first, the familiar belief that the person in question has acted badly or has a bad character, but also, second, a corresponding desire that that person *not* have acted badly or *not* have a bad character' (Sher, George. (2006); p. 14). I appreciate the attraction of such an account, and yet it cannot quite work as a strict definition, for one can imagine a case in which one blames someone for a bad action or trait, and yet through some twist of fate their fault happened to bring a great benefit to oneself or others one cares about, so that one simply has no negative desire in respect of what one blames them for.

¹² For a characterisation and affirmation specifically of 'angry blame', see Wolf, Susan. (2011) 'Blame Italian Style', essay 14 in *Reasons and Recognition: Essays on the Philosophy of T. M. Scanlon*, eds. Wallace, R. Jay, Kumar, Rahul & Freeman, Samuel (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

¹³ Austin, J. L. (1962) *How to Do Things with Words* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

¹⁴ See Coady, C. A. J. (1992) *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* Oxford: Clarendon; p. 43.

¹⁵ For a different use of this picture of blame's desired impact on the wrongdoer, where it is employed specifically to furnish a defense of retributive punishment, see Duff, Antony. (2001) *Punishment, Communication, and Community* Oxford: Oxford University Press; and Bennett, Christopher. (2008) *The Apology Ritual: A Philosophical Theory of Punishment* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁶ See Gaita, Raimond. (2004), ch. 4.

¹⁷ I thank Victoria McGeer for emphasizing this point (see her 'Civilizing Blame' in Coates, D. Justin and Tognazzini, Neal A. eds. *Blame: Its Nature and Norms* (2013) Oxford: Oxford University Press), and also an anonymous reviewer.

¹⁸ There is evidence that something like Communicative Blame ('interpersonal confrontation') can bring people to feel bad and correct their behaviour even in fraught areas such as accusations of racism. See Czopp, Alexander M., Monteith,

Margo J. and Mark, Aimee Y. (2006) 'Standing Up for a Change: Reducing Bias Through Interpersonal Confrontation', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 90, No. 5; 784-803. I thank Michael Brownstein for directing me to this research.

¹⁹ I thank Hanna Pickard for pointing me to this model of dealing with wrongdoing. For an application in relation to disorders of agency, see Pickard, Hanna. (forthcoming) 'Responsibility without Blame: Philosophical Reflections on Clinical Practice', *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Psychiatry*, eds. Fulford, K. W. M., Davies, M., Gipps, R. T., Graham, G., Sadler, J., Strangellini, G., & Thornton, T. Oxford University Press.

²⁰ I thank Paulina Sliwa for comments on a draft which brought out this point.

²¹ Williams, Bernard. (1995) 'Internal Reasons and The Obscurity of Blame', in *Making Sense of Humanity and other philosophical papers 1982-1993* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; p. 40-43.

²² Note, however, that the communication need not be made by the wronged party. Indeed one can easily envisage cases where the Communicative Blame is more effective when expressed by someone else—perhaps someone the wrongdoer has more respect for.

²³ Williams discusses the baseline concern for the esteem of others in connection with shame in Williams, Bernard. (1993) *Shame and Necessity* Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA University of California Press; ch. 4.

²⁴ I thank John Tasioulas for bringing me to see this point.

²⁵ See Strawson (1974) p.14. That moral judgements may often be vicarious in form—a matter of what someone else may properly feel in response to their treatment, where that is moderated according to how you would feel if you were receiving the same treatment—is an idea often appealed to in the sentimentalist tradition in terms of the operation of sympathy. Adam Smith, discussing demerit, says, for instance 'our sense of [an action's] demerit arises from what I shall here too call an indirect sympathy with the resentment of the sufferer' (Smith, Adam. (2009) *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* London: Penguin. Part II, Sect. 1, Ch.V; p. 90).

²⁶ I thank Cristina Roadevin for helpful discussion of this aspect of blame.

²⁷ I thank Amber Carpenter and Rachael Wiseman for helpful discussion of these points.

²⁸ I gave nascent versions of the talk behind this paper at a workshop at Stanford and colloquia at the Universities of Alberta, British Columbia, Durham, Hertfordshire, Leeds, Oxford, Pennsylvania, St Andrews, and York, and I am very grateful for invaluable discussions on all these occasions, as well as to Chris Bennett, Paulina Sliwa, and Holly Lawford-Smith for helpful comments on a draft. I also presented it at the Colloquium in Legal and Social Philosophy at UCL, where I benefited from discussions with my host commentator, John Tasioulas, and from the comments given by Stephen Guest and George Letsas; and at the Central APA where I benefited from the contributions of the commentators, Rahul Kumar and Paul Russell, and from informal discussion afterwards with Lorraine Code, Sally Haslanger, Richard Holton, Tori McGeer, and Michael Smith. Finally, let me also express my thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this journal, whose comments I have most gratefully incorporated.