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Blame: Its Nature and Norms, edited by D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xi + 318. H/b \$99.00, P/b \$29.95.

What is blame, and what makes blame appropriate? These questions are not just philosophically interesting in their own right; thanks to P. F. Strawson's seminal paper 'Freedom and Resentment' (reprinted in Gary Watson (ed.) *Free Will*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), the answers to these questions are now widely regarded as crucial to understanding the nature of moral responsibility. Strawson argues that our practice of holding one another morally responsible is explanatorily prior to being morally responsible, and so we cannot understand what it is to be blameworthy without understanding the nature and appropriateness of blame. Because contemporary work on moral responsibility has largely followed Strawson here, philosophical interest in blame is burgeoning. With the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of 'Freedom and Resentment' only just behind us, now is a fitting time to survey the current philosophical landscape on questions concerning blame.

To that end, *Blame: Its Nature and Norms*, edited by D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini, is well-timed and, I think, successfully reveals the current state of philosophical thinking on blame. In their excellent introduction, Coates and Tognazzini divide the issues surrounding blame into three categories: the nature of blame, the appropriateness of blame, and the value of blame. Nearly every essay in the volume addresses at least one of these issues. I will focus on the first, although the second will be woven into this discussion and the third will be touched upon briefly.

Coates and Tognazzini’s introduction usefully divides up accounts of the nature of blame into four categories: cognitive accounts, conative accounts, Strawsonian (or reactive attitude) accounts, and functional accounts. Cognitive accounts see blame as constituted by a negative evaluative judgement of the agent on account of her action. I will ignore these accounts for two related reasons. First, they are now widely rejected on the grounds that they cannot account for the distinctive force of blame, and second, no essay in the collection endorses one.

Conative accounts of blame supplement the evaluative aspect of blame with conative elements like desires, intentions, and expectations. Two conative accounts of blame—one by George Sher and one by T. M. Scanlon—are currently widely discussed in the literature. On Sher’s view, to blame someone for an action is to believe that he is blameworthy for it and to desire that he not have acted in that way. This belief–desire pair anchors a set of affective and behavioral dispositions, like anger and reproach, that are typically associated with blame (George Sher, *In Praise of Blame*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 112). According to Scanlon, to blame someone is first to judge him blameworthy—that is, to judge that his actions reveal that he has attitudes that impair his relationships with others—and second to modify your relationship with him in ways that this judgement of impaired relationships makes appropriate. In the case of moral blame, you modify your moral relationship with him by changing your desires, intentions, and dispositions toward him in ways such as withholding trust and no longer desiring that things go well for him (T. M. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 128–9, 143–4).

Ten of *Blame*'s fifteen essays admirably engage with at least one of these influential conative views, with Scanlon's view getting the most attention. Scanlon's own essay (Ch. 5) nicely compresses his argument for his view of blame and then addresses powerful criticisms that have been raised against it in other venues by Gary Watson, Jay Wallace, and Susan Wolf. These responses are impressive and a must-read for those interested in Scanlon's view.

Yet, I am not convinced that Scanlon has successfully met Watson's criticism. Watson argues that Scanlon's view runs afoul of the idea that we should only blame those who are accountable ('The Trouble With Psychopaths' in *Reasons and Recognition: Essays on the Philosophy of T.M. Scanlon*, eds. R. Jay Wallace, Rahul Kumar, and Samuel Freeman, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). This is because, on Scanlon's view, faulty attitudes toward others are sufficient grounds for blame; however, someone can have faulty attitudes without being accountable. Watson illustrates this point with the psychopath. It is commonly thought that psychopaths cannot understand moral requirements, and if this is right, it seems unreasonable for us to blame them for failing to comply with those requirements. Yet Scanlon's view seems to say that it is appropriate to blame them when they act wrongly from faulty attitudes. Scanlon responds by claiming that participation in "normal" moral relationships requires the ability to recognize and respond to moral requirements. Thus, if psychopaths lack this ability, they cannot participate in – and so cannot impair – normal moral relationships. For example, Scanlon says that psychopaths are not candidates for relationships of trust or cooperation, so withholding trust or cooperation from them on account of their faulty attitudes is not blame. The upshot is this: on Scanlon's view, it is conceptually impossible to blame

psychopaths. At best, we may *think* that we blame them when we respond to them in ways that typically constitute blame for Scanlon, because we mistakenly take them to be participants in moral relationships, but our response would not actually amount to blame.

I think that Scanlon's response to Watson is problematic. Intuitively, we conceptually can—and do—blame psychopaths. This intuition is supported by the fact that it seems wrong to claim, as Scanlon does, that whether a particular response counts as blame depends upon metaphysical features of the target of the response to which the responder might not even have access. The reasonable thing to say is rather that these metaphysical features of the target determine whether a blaming response is appropriate (or fitting), not whether it is blame. Whether a response amounts to blame should depend only upon features of the response and the responder (although these features will, of course, make ineliminable reference to the target of the response in order to be directed at him and be about him—for example, they will include what the responder thinks about the target). Hence, contrary to Scanlon, actual features of the psychopath, such as whether he has the ability to recognize and respond to moral reasons, only matter for determining whether it is appropriate to blame him.

Another difficulty with Scanlon's view is that it is silent on the question of your motivation for modifying your moral relationship with a wrongdoer when you blame him. To see this, suppose that you judge that a wrongdoer has relationship-impairing attitudes and as a result you withdraw trust from him. Suppose further that this withdrawal of trust is an appropriate modification of your relationship with him given his attitudes. On Scanlon's view, you blame him. Yet, your motivation for withdrawing trust from him based on your judgment of his relationship-impairing attitudes might be that you desire to

protect yourself from him or that you dislike people with such relationship-impairing attitudes. In these cases, your response is not blame because your reason for it is of the wrong kind. To be blame, it seems that you must judge that he has relationship-impairing attitudes and then appropriately modify your relationship with him from some sort of concern for moral considerations. I think that Scanlon needs to supplement his view to take account of this point.

Angela Smith (Ch. 2) and Christopher Bennett (Ch. 4) each claim that Scanlon's view is missing something vital: that blame is implicitly or incipiently *communicative* in nature. They each then argue that we arrive at the right account of blame by supplementing Scanlon's view to account for this fact. Smith's solution is to incorporate into Scanlon's view an understanding of blame as moral protest. As Smith puts it, 'It is only those modifications of attitudes that are undertaken as a way of *protesting* the relationship-impairing attitudes of others that qualify as instances of moral blame' (p. 39). Bennett, on the other hand, supplements Scanlon's account with the idea that the modification of the relationship is done so as to express disapproval of the action.

These proposals have much to commend them. They capture intuitive elements of blame, and they overcome my above objection to Scanlon by supplementing his view with a plausible account of the motivation that you must have in modifying your relationship with someone in order for your response to count as blame. However, it is not clear to me that these proposals overcome Watson's challenge to Scanlon. After all, it seems to me that you can reasonably modify your relationship with a psychopath who acts wrongly from faulty attitudes as a way of protesting or disapproving of his action, since others in the moral community—such as his victims—can understand this

communication. Thus both accounts of blame seem to wrongly claim that we can blame those who are not accountable.

There is another problem with Smith's account (and likely a similar problem with Bennett's, although I will leave that aside). Smith says that, when we blame, we protest the false claim about the victim's moral status implicit in the wrongdoer's action by challenging it and registering that the victim did not deserve to be so treated. This is an attractive view, and it may be necessary for blame. But it is not sufficient. Modifying Smith's own example, consider a mother who judges that her criminal son is blameworthy. In response to this judgement, she modifies her attitudes toward him by becoming disposed to tell her son that his victims do not deserve to be treated in that way. On Smith's account, the mother blames her son; however, this need not be so, as we can imagine that she does this only as a way of teaching him.

Sher (Ch. 3) raises a different objection to Scanlon's view: namely, that it cannot adequately justify blaming strangers. On Scanlon's view, the standards internal to a relationship justify blame towards someone who violates those standards and so impairs the relationship. Yet, Sher argues, a relationship must be constituted by mutual intentions and expectations in order for this justification to work, but on Scanlon's view, the moral relationship—the only relationship that we have with a stranger—need not have this mutuality because it is inescapable: even if someone has terrible attitudes toward you, you are still in a moral relationship with him (as long as he has the requisite capacities). The upshot, says Sher, is that Scanlon cannot justify moral blame by appealing to the standards of the moral relationship.

However, I think that Sher's objection misses its mark. On Scanlon's view of blame, there are two levels of moral relationship. The 'default moral relationship' is constituted by our intentions and expectations regarding aspects of morality that we owe to everyone—like saving someone from serious harm if we can easily do so – *and* aspects that we do not owe to everyone—like hoping that things go well with someone. The default moral relationship requires mutual intentions and expectations. If someone acts wrongly, then on Scanlon's view, we are no longer justified in treating him like a participant in the default moral relationship, and so it is appropriate to modify our intentions and expectations toward him with respect to those aspects of morality that we do not owe everyone. For example, we can cease to hope that things go well for him. This marks the transition from the default moral relationship to the 'impaired moral relationship'. Hence, contrary to Sher, the standards internal to the default moral relationship justify blame on Scanlon's view.

Let's turn now to Sher's view, on which to blame someone for her action is to believe that she is blameworthy for it and to desire that she not have acted that way. Although Sher does not discuss his own view in his contribution to the collection, other authors do. Smith (Ch. 2) argues—rightly in my view—that Sher's account is insufficient because the mother of the criminal son can believe that her son is blameworthy and wish that he had not acted in that way without blaming him. Derk Pereboom (Ch. 10) forcefully argues—also rightly in my view—that blame on Sher's account can exist in a world without moral responsibility. Given the powerful objections raised here and elsewhere, Sher might have discussed his view and responded to recent objections to it, as Scanlon does in his contribution. This is especially so because, after presenting his

objection to Scanlon, Sher spends the rest of his essay raising objections to a view of punishment and a view of atonement that, like Scanlon's view of blame, seek to justify backwards-looking responses to wrongdoing by appealing to the standards internal to relationships. Sher's objections to these two views seem correct, but they may strike the reader as a little off the topic of the collection.

As should now be clear, *Blame* contains excellent discussion of conative views of blame, particularly Scanlon's. Yet the difficulties raised against them might lead us to think that they miss something important. In particular, we might think, as Victoria McGeer (Ch. 9) and Christopher Evan Franklin (Ch. 11) argue, that they overlook the crucial role played by reactive emotions—for example, resentment and indignation—that are central to Strawson's own account of our blaming practices. In fact, due to Strawson's influence, the dominant view of blame has been that to blame someone just is to have a reactive attitude toward him. Although no essay in this volume explicitly defends this reactive attitude account of blame, its dominance is in the background. For example, R. Jay Wallace (Ch. 12)—who elsewhere adeptly defends the reactive attitude account of blame (*Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994)—assumes it in order to argue that the nature of moral responsibility shows that morality is fundamentally relational and hence that consequentialism and perfectionism are wrong. This is an intriguing argument in underexplored territory. Michael McKenna (Ch. 7) argues that, although reactive emotions can be privately held, they are fundamentally forms of communication. He uses this to support his *conversational theory* of moral responsibility, here presented in condensed form. Franklin argues that blame, understood as reactive attitudes, is valuable because it is necessary in

order to value objects of moral value. Yet the reactive attitude account of blame has its detractors in this collection too. Scanlon and Smith argue that we can blame dispassionately, and so this view of blame must be wrong. Pereboom argues, *pace* Franklin, that reactive attitudes are not valuable because they are often destructive to relationships and are unnecessary to achieve the positive aspects of blame, and so we should prefer an account of blame that does not have them. He then argues for an account of blame that the free will sceptic can endorse—one that aims at and is justified by its deterrent effect.

How should we adjudicate the dispute between those who think that blame requires reactive attitudes and those who think that we can blame dispassionately? Victoria McGeer provides a fascinating solution: a functional account of blame. On her view, '[blame] is a state that is apt for being caused by perceived wrongdoing and apt for producing certain behavioral effects' (p. 169). She then argues that negative emotions typically, but not invariably, play this causal role in humans. Hence blame centrally involves reactive attitudes, and the fact that we can blame dispassionately is no counterexample to this. (Like Franklin, she also argues that reactive attitudes play a valuable role in our lives, even though they need to be 'domesticated'.) Interestingly, as Coates and Tognazzini note in their introduction, Smith's protest view of blame (discussed above) is a functionalist account: blame functions to protest false moral claims about the victim's moral status implicit in wrongdoing.

In closing, let me illustrate the wide coverage of this collection by touching on the essays not mentioned above. Those interested in criminal blame should consider David Shoemaker's argument (Ch. 6) that Scanlon's account of moral blame cannot be extended

to criminal blame and that this is as it should be, since the functions of criminal blame and moral blame differ. The nature of excuses for wrongdoing is taken up by Erin I. Kelly (Ch. 13), who argues that we should understand them as representing the threshold of what we can reasonably expect people to bear in order to do the right thing. Macalester Bell (Ch. 14) and Coleen Macnamara (Ch. 8) each challenge commonly held assumptions regarding blame. Bell challenges the popular view that we lack the standing to blame others for transgressions that we ourselves do (the ‘Nonhypocritical Condition’). Macnamara argues against the idea, widespread in the literature, that we should understand expressions of reactive attitudes as demands. Finally, Gary Watson’s essay (Ch. 15) focuses on the nature of (non)judgementalism and persuasively argues that nonjudgementalism, understood as a virtue, does not require suspending moral evaluations. Rather, it is looking for the best in people and accepting their faults, where the latter is a commitment not to let disagreements prevent good relations.

Coates and Tognazzini’s collection is outstanding. It is wide-ranging and yet has depth on influential views of blame. The rich connections amongst the essays are particularly impressive. The collection effectively captures the current state of debate while moving it forward. *Blame* is essential reading for those interested in blame and moral responsibility.

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