RECOGNIZING CONSTRAINTS ON MORAL REASONING
AND THE FAIRNESS OF BLAME

By

Christine Nicole Esselmont

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Abstract

Many argue that moral blame is unfair when poor formative circumstances negatively influence an individual’s ability to appreciate moral reasons. For example, Susan Wolf refers to the pre-conditions for being blamed as being “connected to the world in a certain sort of way” and R. Jay Wallace emphasizes the importance of an agent’s being able to exercise what he refers to as “powers of reflective self-control” if blame is to be fair. Wallace in particular contends that to blame an individual who is unable to adequately respond to reasons is to participate in an unfair practice of burdening those who are often better described as victims.

I argue that we should reject this claim about blame, and the conception of moral responsibility that underlies it, while remaining sympathetic to some of the concerns raised by its proponents. What I call the Unfair Victim argument makes claims that seem *prima facie*, quite plausible. I contend that rejecting it does not require that one overlook the fact that poor formative circumstances can make it more difficult to recognize moral reasons or that this may cause particular individuals to suffer hardship. I argue that a more defensible, Scanlonian view of blame still allows one to recognize the hardship suffered by those described by the Unfair Victim argument without having to accept that this hardship diminishes moral responsibility or renders blame unfair.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In this dissertation I challenge the claim that it is unfair to blame those whose appreciation of moral reasons is negatively influenced by poor formative circumstances. I refer to the argument supporting this claim as the Unfair Victim (UV) argument. The reasons for focusing on poor formative circumstances in particular are multiple. First, the philosophical literature concerning the unfairness of blame frequently cites these influences as the ones that render blame unfair. Secondly, addressing the role of these sorts of influences on recognizing moral reasons is one of the most effective ways to call into question arguments about the fairness of blame. For example, in contrast with something like one’s own prejudices, poor, formative influences are generally understood to be uncontrollable by the agent, and thus, a paradigmatic example of how circumstances can sometimes make blame unfair.

The dissertation is comprised of three main chapters. In the second chapter, I provide an explanation of the UV argument in more detail. I also defend the relationship-based Scanlonian view of blame that I favour and the way in which normative relational standards inform this view of blame. Although I deny that poor formative circumstances make blame unfair, I explain why this denial should not be understood as an endorsement that all circumstances are irrelevant to blame. There are a variety of circumstances that make blame inappropriate or that give grounds for its modification. Certain circumstances inform whether an agent’s attitudes ought to be understood as impairing and to what extent. I argue that poor formative circumstances are generally not circumstances of this sort.

The UV argument contends that to blame a wrongdoer in the circumstances it cites is to unfairly burden this individual. I argue that although it may be unfortunate that someone suffers
the ill-effects associated with failing to recognize moral reasons, it is misleading to characterize these ill-effects as unfair burdens. This is both because I disagree that reactive attitudes such as resentment and indignation are the hallmarks of blame and also because I argue that the language of “unfair burdens” is a misleading way to characterize the hardship associated with blame. This language suggests that the hardship or burden involved in blame is one that is distributed by and under the control of she who blames. Some philosophical literature describes blame as a unique burden or force, and I do not think that this characterization is altogether mistaken.

Still, in contrast with the proponents of the UV argument, I argue that this force should be understood not as emanating from she who blames, but rather, from the wrongdoer herself. This forceful burden is best understood in terms of a wrongdoer’s recognition of the significance of her wrongdoing for her relations with others. This recognition is something that is not under the direct control of the one who blames. Although I deny that the significance of blame for one’s relations with others is agent-dependent, I agree that how an agent experiences the force or burden of blame can be understood in this way. I argue that if those individuals cited in the UV argument suffer a unique burden when blamed, it is the burden that comes with partially recognizing the significance of one’s wrongdoing, but failing to successfully conform to moral norms or to be able to respond appropriately. In what follows, I turn to a closer examination of what it means to recognize moral reasons.

In the third chapter, I assess four main cases from the philosophical literature in order to better engage with what it means to recognize moral reasons. It is important to understand this activity of this in order to be able to evaluate the strength of the claims made UV argument. Although I am sympathetic to the claim that this recognition may be negatively influenced by certain circumstances, I also argue that a closer assessment of these cases shows that they are
less persuasive in this regard than it is sometimes assumed. I believe that there is reason to question the extent to which poor formative circumstance actually pose significant difficulty to appreciating the significance of moral reasons. The activity of recognizing moral reasons is one that should be understood as not only involving the possession of certain judgments, but also the presence of certain patterns of reasoning and ways of acting. I briefly consider the role that other influences such as motivated irrationality, anxiety, and psychopathy might have on the recognition of moral reasons, though the role of these influences is not my central focus.

The chapter also includes an explanation of how the significance of these various influences on moral reasoning is best understood on a relationship-based view of blame. The discussion of how these considerations may reasonably affect blame is contrasted with the UV argument’s claim that blame is unfair in light of poor formative circumstances. Various philosophers to whom I am sympathetic, such as Robert Adams, Angela Smith and T. M. Scanlon, reject the claims of the UV argument while maintaining that these negative influences on moral reasoning may sometimes appropriately influence one’s treatment of a wrongdoer. The accounts they put forth benefit from closer consideration in order to explain the extent to which it is reasonable to maintain that these circumstances might appropriately inform expressions of blame. I ultimately agree that these circumstances often have relevance to one’s treatment of an unfortunately influenced wrongdoer, though my analysis will show that I do not always agree with the analysis of this relevance as articulated by those aforementioned. The fourth chapter helps to explain why I affirm that poor formative circumstances can be understood as reasonably relevant to one’s treatment of a wrongdoer without committing one to the claim that blame is unfair in such cases.
In the fourth and last substantial chapter, I further develop the distinction between blame and expressed blame. Since I am primarily interested in expressed blame as a form of communication, I elaborate on how it can be understood as such on a narrow interpretation of “expressions of blame.” Because blame itself is also sometimes described as a form of communication, I address the arguments put forth by Angela Smith and Coleen Macnamara that favour this view. I assess these arguments to better distinguish between my understanding of expressions of blame as a form of communication and their understanding of blame as a communicative entity. I also do so in order to elucidate the shortfalls of understanding blame in this way. Though there are some appealing elements to this account, I argue that their accounts fail to take seriously the reasons that particular individuals may have for expressing or withholding blame, and that these reasons help to explain why blame itself should not be understood as communicative. Some of the reasons that individuals have for failing to express blame primarily have to do with the interests of the agent herself, but others have to do primarily with the wrongdoer.

Some reasons are more decisive such as the reasons one has to avoid the infliction of cruelty. Others, such as reasons of compassion, are less decisive but recognize the normative appropriateness of sometimes acting so as to reduce someone’s hardship or suffering. I contend that there is a balance to be struck in weighing the reasons one has to modify or avoid expressing blame and the reasons that one has to convey blame. I also argue that expressions of blame often play a morally valuable role in relationships and more generally. These expressions often facilitate the repair of impaired relationships and may also facilitate a wrongdoer’s recognition of the significance of his or her wrong, and of moral reasons more generally.
The idea of mercy is sometimes employed in the literature to refer to the reasons one has to modify expressions of blame that are focused on the well-being of the wrongdoer. I refer to these sorts of reasons as reasons of compassion. Though there is some similarity between the two, I will explain why I find the language of mercy to be unwieldy when applied to the interpersonal realm as compared to the legal realm. Though I do not discuss mercy at length, John Tasioulas’ account of mercy and the communicative function of punishment remains a helpful way to understand the communicative goals that are often associated with expressions of blame. Lastly, I consider a literary example from Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* in order to help explain how one might facilitate someone’s recognition of what Robert Adams refers to as “moral realities” through the expression of blame. This example elucidates how remaining sensitive to a wrongdoer’s suffering is compatible with expressing blame and to facilitating the recognition of moral reasons. This allows one to remain sensitive to the hardship posed by poor formative circumstances without prohibiting morally valuable expressions of blame or committing one to the claim that these circumstances render blame unfair.
Chapter 2: The Charge of Unfair Blame

“If he has a conscience he will suffer for his mistake. That will be his punishment – as well as the prison. [. . .] He will suffer if he is sorry for his victim. Pain and suffering are always inevitable for a large intelligence and a deep heart.”

(Fyodor Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment)

I. Introduction

Blaming is often characterized as a sort of burden, a burden that one elects to place upon the shoulders of she who is blamed. This characterization is neither wholly inaccurate nor unreasonable. For example, blame may be experienced as burdensome in some sense, and blaming sometimes involves a decision about how to treat others. That being said, this characterization can also be misleading. Namely, there is an important sense in which blame is not best described as a decision about how to treat a wrongdoer. Furthermore, it is misleading to characterize the burdensome aspect of blame as having its source primarily in something that is done by the person doing the blaming.

It is this latter characterization of blame as burdensome that is often presupposed in arguments concerning blame’s unfairness. The claim goes something like this: blame is a burden that one chooses to impose upon others and this burden is an unfair burden, especially when an agent lacks certain control over his or her own attitudes and reasoning. In some ways, this

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2 The idea that blame is something that one chooses to do and is a punitive response to wrongdoing is found in some philosophical literature. As George Sher notes in In Praise of Blame, blame is often construed as an attitude that is unfairly judgmental, hostile and inimical to moral progress and healing. George Sher, In Praise of Blame (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), viii. Although being judgmental may be a moral vice, especially when it means that someone hypocritically overlooks her own weaknesses when blaming others, to claim that blame is inherently hostile to relationships would seem to be a gross overstatement. This is in part because other reparative practices such as forgiveness and reconciliation seem to presuppose the fact that blame is at least sometimes appropriate, and is often required in order for relationships to be repaired after wrongdoing.

3 Consider the following passages by R. Jay Wallace and Susan Wolf: Wallace describes moral responsibility as involving the distribution of moral sanctions: “Thinking of moral responsibility as a system for distributing the benefits and burdens of human favor, we can imagine distributive outcomes that we would not consider fair. It would seem unfair, for instance, if those who lose
seems like an appealing and plausible position to maintain. Surely, one is only morally responsible for the things that one chooses to do, where choice presupposes a certain degree of control. Along with calling into question the aforementioned view of blame, I also question the further claim that individuals are only the appropriate object of blame for matters under their direct control or only for the attitudes or actions that they choose to possess. In contrast, I favour a view of blame whereby all attitudes and actions with their source in an evaluative judgment, whether conscious or not, are worthy of moral evaluation. In this sense, responsibility for one’s attitudes and actions is attributive.

In this dissertation, I will focus on assessing what I call the “Unfair Victim” argument. According to this argument, circumstances that negatively influence an agent’s attitudes or actions are relevant to blame, placing blame as an unfair burden upon a helpless victim. I do not deny that the attitudes and actions involved in blame can vary in appropriateness, or that this appropriateness may sometimes depend upon considerations about a particular agent or circumstance. What I deny is that the lack of control one has over the person one becomes is something that diminishes one’s responsibility for attitudes or actions and renders moral criticism inappropriate. Although it is easy to state how my view differs from that of others, the more complicated task remains in explaining why I believe my understanding of blame to be

out in the distribution did not have the powers of reflective self-control to begin with, or if their educational or social conditions were such as to inhibit the normal development of those powers. People who lack these powers are deprived of the general capacity to avoid the kinds of action that incur moral sanction, and so they are relevantly disadvantaged in the processes that result in the distributive outcomes.” R. Jay Wallace, Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 200.

Wolf describes the unfairness of considering someone responsible for the actions that follow from the perverse character that has been largely influenced by that which is beyond his control: “In light of JoJo’s heritage and upbringing – both of which he was powerless to control – it is dubious at best that he should be regarded as responsible for what he does. It is unclear whether anyone with a childhood such as his could have developed into anything but the twisted and perverse sort of person that he has become.” Susan Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility,” in Free Will, ed. Gary Watson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 379.
more defensible, and especially why I contend that poor formative circumstances, which one cannot control, do not make blame inappropriate. In this chapter, I will lay some of the groundwork for my dissertation as a whole. Additionally, I will clarify my terminology and then analyze and defend the way in which I use a philosophical framework in order to study blame. I will also describe my understanding of normativity as it applies to relationships and blame. The view of blame that I will be employing and that I will be defending is importantly relationship-based.

II. Blame, Responsibility and Normativity

Before laying the groundwork and articulating the terms used in my dissertation, I will provide a brief reconstruction of what I call the Unfair Victim (UV) argument. Although the premises and conclusions of this argument are rarely spelled out, it is my contention that many debates concerning the unfairness of blame rely on some version of this argument. The UV argument is clearest when it is stated in the following form, though some premises remain implicit:

Agent (A) is subject to negative, uncontrollable formative circumstances (C).

C negatively influences A’s ability to comply with, or appropriately respond to, important normative standards such as moral considerations (M).

If A fails to respond appropriately to these normative standards because of circumstances C, then C makes it unfair to blame, or to fail to modify blame.\(^4\)

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\(^4\) This argument is clearest in its implications if circumstances C can be shown to have made Agent A \emph{completely unable} to appropriately respond to these normative considerations. In such a case, the implication would be that the agent should not be blamed because blame would be unfair. Proponents of this view sometimes employ drastic cases where it is nearly impossible for individuals to recognize moral reasons because of past influences. The implications for blame are less obvious in cases where an unfortunate agent still responds to moral considerations in ways that are at least \emph{partially} appropriate. For example, whereas complete blindness to moral reasons would seem to make all blame unfair on this view, partial blindness may only make it appropriate to blame to a certain extent, or in a certain way, though this is unclear. Note also that I am not claiming that all who affirm some version of this argument claim that these circumstances \emph{necessarily} negatively influence someone. For example, see Wallace, \emph{Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments}, 232.
Before proceeding to discuss the claims associated with the UV argument, I must explain why I am approaching blame through a philosophical lens and why I think that employing the philosophical literature is appropriate for my purposes. It could be thought that the task of elucidating blame lies mainly in the domain of psychology. In this view, an assessment of blame might be thought to involve an explanation of the way in which various emotions and beliefs constitute blame, understood as a sort of psychological phenomenon. Although it is true that blame can be described in terms of various emotions and actions with which it is often associated, I believe that it is also subject to normative considerations. Indeed, it is this normative dimension that, in my view, makes philosophical analysis entirely appropriate.

I will argue that there are norms governing both judgments of blameworthiness, and likewise, norms governing blame, though this does not imply that poor formative circumstances make blame unfair. Blameworthiness and blame should also be understood as distinct. Not all judgments of blameworthiness always result in blame, or blame of the same character. For example, someone may come to the realization that her friend suffers from the same weakness that she herself possesses, conceivably a propensity to judge the other too harshly. If the person who is hurt by her friend’s harsh judgment also suffers from the same fault, then she has little grounds to condemn her friend or to act as though the relationship is otherwise unimpaired. Furthermore, not all cases in which someone actually blames another are cases in which the person ought to be considered blameworthy. It may be that the expectations that someone has of her friends are too demanding with the result that she blames them for so-called normative violations that are both unreasonable and indefensible.

The account of blame that I draw upon most frequently is the one put forth by T.M. Scanlon in his work *Moral Dimensions*. Scanlon describes his view of blame in terms of five
main elements: the ground relationship, the impairment caused by particular attitudes, the position of the responder (she who blames), the significance of the impairment for the responder and the response (blame) that is appropriate. His account of blame is relationally-based in that it proposes that blame is best understood in relation to the standards that govern different sorts of relationships and to “the responder’s relation to the agent, action, and impairment.” These relations may be as diverse as the relation in which one stands to a parent, a friend, or fellow rational being with whom one has no additional, further relation. Scanlon refers to these relationships as the “ground relationship.” He contends that blame, properly understood, is a response to the attitudes demonstrated by those within these relationships. Certain attitudes and dispositions will either be in accord with the standards of a particular relationship or will violate the relational standards. When someone violates these standards, the relationship will be understood as impaired. For example, if the ground relationship of friendship requires that friends show special concern for one another, and if a friend fails to demonstrate special concern or fails to hold particular attitudes of concern, then this violation can be understood as blameworthy and as an impairment of this particular relationship.

Whether or not blame is appropriate will be dependent upon a variety of factors including one’s relation to the wrongdoing in question: whether one is the friend who was directly involved, a friend of a friend, and so on. There are times when it is appropriate for those not directly involved to blame the wrongdoer. For example, it may be fitting for a fellow worker to

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6 The impairment involved in blame is a particular sort. The sort of revision of attitudes, expectations and intentions involved in blame may also occur in response to other sorts of impairment that are not central to blame. For example, a relationship may become impaired as two friends grow apart with no violation to the standards of the relationship. Scanlon writes: “Impairment of the kind I refer to occurs when one party, while standing in the relevant relation to another person, holds attitudes toward that person that are ruled out by the standards of that relationship.” Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 135.
blame a superior who shows disdain for workers in general through his poor treatment of a particular worker. At other times, one’s position makes it clear that the attitudes of an individual, such as an uncommitted spouse, cannot have the same meaning for the spouse as it might for a friend of the spouse. What Scanlon refers to as an act’s “meaning” helps to explain what is meant by an act’s significance. The meaning of an action is understood in terms of “the significance that person has reason to assign it, given the reasons for which it was performed and the person’s relation to the agent.”\(^7\) An assessment of significance is dependent both on the nature of the attitude in question or the reason for which the act was performed, and is also dependent on the position of the person who blames.\(^8\) The significance of the attitude for the individual doing the blaming may also be affected by the history of the relationship including the previous attitudes and actions held by the individuals in question. It would not be wrong for someone who had previously failed to show concern to recognize that their partner’s lack of concern is blameworthy, but it would be wrong for her to ignore the fact that her own attitudes had already left the relationship impaired, just as it would be hypocritical to assume an attitude of righteous indignation towards the other person, where it might otherwise be appropriate.

The case of Risky Randy and Cautious Clive will help to demonstrate this normative dimension of blame. Both individuals harm an unfortunate bystander, Bob, as a result of their risky, thrill-seeking behaviour. Risky Randy carries out these risky actions while aware of the risks to both him and others. On the other hand, Cautious Clive engages in this same behaviour while remaining largely unaware of the associated risks. If Clive is not culpable for his ignorance, then there is good reason to think that the meaning of the action is different than the meaning of Randy’s act. Now if, for example, Bob happens to be the young son of Randy or

\(^7\) Ibid., 54.
\(^8\) Ibid., 138.
Clive, this would make some difference to the significance that he has reason to assign to the action. Indeed, the recklessness demonstrated by Randy’s attitudes would be all the more hurtful to someone like Bob, whose relation to him is constituted in part by the parental duty of providing special care. The difference between these two actions and different responses that one may have towards Randy versus Clive is not merely an empirical observation about the nature of certain psychological occurrences. It may very well be that most people would typically demonstrate greater anger towards Randy versus Clive, but the differences with which both Scanlon and I are concerned are those that ought to make a difference to blame because of certain normative considerations. This leads me to another important matter: the relation between blame and choice.

Given that the Scanlonian account construes blame not as a feeling that afflicts us, but rather as an alteration of attitudes, this might seem like grounds for claiming that blame is a matter of choice: a choice about how to evaluate others in light of wrongdoing. I would contend that it is misleading to characterize blame in this way, for two main reasons. First, I think that there is good reason for thinking that one may assign blame unconsciously. It is not incomprehensible to accuse someone of having blamed another without their being fully aware of this alteration in attitudes. Secondly, since the notion of Scanlonian blame, when justified, is governed by norms defined by the ground relationship, its standards, and those attitudes that constitute impairment, it would be mistaken to construe it as a matter of choice. There may be permissible differences between what individuals consider as part of the substantive content of

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9 The different way in which the two agents are blamed ought to be rooted in the different implications that their different beliefs, attitudes and actions have for their relations with others. If, for example, Randy engages in an activity, with full awareness that it will likely cause harm to others, then this shows disrespect for other persons and their interests that typically will, and ought to, have implications for his relations with others. Others may understandably be less likely to trust Randy or to view him as the sort of person with whom one can stand in certain relations of mutual respect.
blame-related norms, but it would be misleading to describe these standards as falling completely into the realm of choice.

The norm-related standards that govern blame are not arbitrarily chosen on the Scanlonian account, but again, are grounded in the nature of the relationship in which the wrongdoing occurs, be it collegial, parental, or otherwise. It is true that a relationship type such as “friendship” may encompass a variety of different substantive normative standards.\(^{10}\) Despite this variance, one could still identify certain unreasonable expectations. For example, it will remain inappropriate to feel indignant at the suggestion that friendship requires unquestioning loyalty and that any concerned questioning on the part of a friend is grounds for considering the relationship impaired, even though it may leave some individuals dissatisfied. Although there may be a variety of permissible views about the substance of the standards governing friendship, the aforementioned view is not compatible with most defensible views of friendship. In fact, it is arguably quite important that friends be able to be vulnerable with one another, that they are able and willing to exchange ideas, that they challenge each other, and that they speak honestly, while still respecting one another. It is these normative standards associated with the ground relationship that determine when blame is reasonable and when it is unjustifiable. Other considerations interact with these standards to define the appropriateness of blame. These include facts about the nature of the wrongdoing (i.e. whether it violated a particularly significant standard), the circumstances surrounding the attitude or action (i.e., whether this wrongdoing is

\(^{10}\text{For example, differences may include the fact that some friends may have high standards of communication as part of the standards of their friendship whereas others may be content to be in touch only occasionally. Nonetheless, it is generally agreed that part of what distinguishes friendship from other more general relations is that it is part of friendship that individuals are partial towards their friends, and that this is generally permissible. It may not be permissible to give priority to one’s friend if, for example, one is a hospital administrator required to impartially allocate resources to patients. However, it is permissible, in more common situations, to choose to aid one’s friend over a stranger if one is in a situation where one is faced with a difficult choice. See Bernard Williams, “Persons, Character and Morality,” in Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers, 1973–80 (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1981), 18.}
particularly commonplace or has occurred before within the relationship), the character and
history of the relationship, and facts about the individual who is being blamed (i.e. his or her
attitudes and response to the wrongdoing). While it may be justifiably claimed that it would be
inappropriate to not take these matters into consideration when it comes to blame, this claim
ought to be clearly distinguished from the UV argument’s claim about unfairness as it pertains to
poor formative circumstances.

III. Blame and Appropriateness

Circumstances are not wholly irrelevant to blame. In fact, there are times when blame
will be inappropriate under certain conditions. These conditions are sometimes referred to as
exempting conditions. As I understand it, exempting conditions are those conditions that make it
normatively inappropriate to consider a person’s actions or attitudes as being indicative of any
relational impairment.  

There may be cases when someone’s attitudes fail to be blameworthy, although they may appear so. An obvious case includes someone who is pushed and as a result, causes injury to another person. The person who is pushed does not act in a way that is blameworthy nor does her attitude indicate anything that ought to be understood as impairing the relationship. 

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11 Note that this way of defining exempting conditions is different from the way in which Strawson defines what could be called exempting conditions (though he refers to them as conditions that mollify reactive attitudes). For example, “Seeing someone, then, as warped or deranged or compulsive in behaviour or peculiarly unfortunate in his formative circumstances – seeing someone so tends, at least to some extent, to set him apart from normal participant reactive attitudes on the part of one who so sees him, tends to promote, at least in the civilized, objective attitudes.” P. F. Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” in Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays (London: Methuen, 1974), 9.

12 It may still be the case that others do not realize that the person who fell into them, for example, was pushed and so, they may blame them nonetheless. It may also be that the victim recognizes that the person who fell into them was pushed, but still feels lingering, negative feelings towards this person. In the former case, the victim may still blame the person who was pushed, but this blame is not defensible. In the latter case, the victim may feel something like objective stigma wherein one’s interactions are modified with that person, but not because one considers the other to be blameworthy. For example, T.M. Scanlon, Moral Dimensions (Cambridge : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 148.
More extravagant examples found within the realm of science fiction also demonstrate conditions that appropriately exempt an individual from blame. In the previous example, an individual’s body was moved by the force of another’s push, and thus, the injury caused by her fall is not the result of any blameworthy attitude. Now, imagine a case in which someone is able to manipulate someone else’s brain and in so doing, implants the impulse to do harm. If this attitude is one not brought about by the agent’s own reasoning, then this constitutes a rare case in which a person’s own attitudes do not reflect her own evaluative judgments or assessments in any normatively significant sense. This is another example of a case wherein circumstances make it appropriate for an agent to be exempt from blame. Blame would be inappropriate because the attitudes of the agent should not be understood as impairing a relationship, since they are not properly her own in a very real sense. It is not that these attitudes are not indicative of a “true self” or “chosen self,” although these are sometimes taken to be normatively significant distinctions. Rather, they have no relation whatsoever to any of her other evaluative judgment, nor do they come about because of how her judgments influence the way in which she reasons about her experience.¹³ There are other, more interesting conditions that make the modification of blame appropriate, but these do not constitute an obvious case of exemption from blame. A traditional contrast is drawn between exempting conditions and excusing conditions, but I will

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¹³ The idea of a “true self” being relevant to blame reminiscent of the work of Harry Frankfurt. Frankfurt places great importance on the idea of second order volitions according to which one identifies oneself with certain first-order desires rather than others. These volitions allow for freedom of the will, when the will complies, and thus, the kinds of situations in which individuals can be considered morally responsible. Wolf refers to this sort of explanation of responsibility as a “deep self view” wherein what matters is that desires are identified as those that he agent wants to will. The assumption is that there is a deep or real self that makes this identification and that makes possible our freedom. Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, no.1 (1971): 18–20; Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility,” 375.
avoid using the latter term lest it be confused with the claim that “excuses” that modify blame also excuse responsibility. In the cases that I am taking into account, it is not that wrongs are being excused because of certain facts or conditions; indeed, a judgment of blameworthiness and some degree of blame may still be appropriate.

As noted earlier, these conditions may include facts about the wrongdoing and its significance as well as circumstances surrounding the attitude or action. They may also include the nature and history of the relationship and facts about the individual who is being blamed, including the attitudes that she holds and whether or not she comes to recognize and appropriately respond to the fact of her wrongdoing. Throughout my dissertation, I will consider how some of these facts and conditions may be relevant to blame as understood in Scanlonian terms. First, I will consider how blame ought to vary with differences in the significance of the wrongdoing.

To begin, I will consider two examples that demonstrate two different examples of disrespect: First, imagine that someone, let us call her Sharing Sally, shares with others, the sensitive, private information that has been entrusted to her but which she knows others would find intriguing and interesting. Sally divulges these secrets to her other friends when she is stressed, feeling vulnerable and wanting to impress others. Even though she may be feeling stressed by the situation, Sally’s actions still say something about her assessment of reasons. She may not have betrayed trust under certain conditions, but the fact that she does under others indicates something about her judgments. If she breaks trust more frequently, this further confirms that her recognition of the value of others is either absent or so variable that it is easily
overridden, time and time again.\textsuperscript{14} One’s inability to maintain the trust of others is significant when understood in the context of standing in potential or actual relations with others and the importance of being able to successfully maintain those relations with others. The failure to maintain trust will no doubt impair the relations in which one stands with others.

Compare Sally’s this case to a second case where the same friend, instead of betraying trust, shows up to a meeting late without a good excuse. Tardiness may be a relatively insignificant violation of the standards of friendship, but if someone is late time and time again, it hints at the presence of an underlying attitude of disrespect toward people and their time. Both instances of disrespect are a violation of a normative standard, but the disrespect shown in being late for meetings does not seem to be as significant as the disrespect shown in intentionally revealing information with which one has been explicitly entrusted.\textsuperscript{15} The meaning of each act is different because of the particular attitudes involved, and the significance of those attitudes for the relationship will bear upon whether the relationship is understood as being impaired, and to what extent. Along with an agent’s attitudes, some background conditions should arguably change the degree of impairment that certain attitudes should be thought to cause. For example, stress seems to be one such plausible condition.

While stress is not something that makes someone’s attitudes less than her own, stress is generally and rightly understood as something that makes it more difficult to make good

\textsuperscript{14} Arpaly speaks of such matters when referring to the relevance or irrelevance of the frequency of certain sorts of acts. Nomy Arpaly, \textit{Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Moral Agency} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 95. Note that rejecting the relevance of certain circumstances to responsibility and blame does not commit me to rejecting the fact that some situations may be so legitimately overwhelming that how someone acts says very little about his or her judgments. It also does not restrict me from accepting the view that some individuals may suffer such ailments such as panic attacks or certain mental disorders in a way that makes actions so unreflective of judgments that such individuals cannot be called upon to justify their attitudes or actions.

\textsuperscript{15} At least, this seems true, \textit{prima facie}. Constantly being late for meetings but only once betraying trust may suggest otherwise.
judgments or to be attentive to certain considerations. For example, one’s friend may be a poor listener when she is distracted by her child’s poor health. One may normally interpret her lack of attentiveness, and lack of interest in the conversation as indicating her lack of respect or failure to take an interest in one’s problems. The stress caused by her child’s sickness is a condition that seems to change how one understands the individual’s judgement of what is important. It helps to make sense of the extent to which her friend’s seeming lack of concern is because of a failure to take interest in her well-being or whether it’s because she is focused on something else that reasonably dominates her attention. Circumstances like stress may affect the degree of relational impairment and thus, blame, in some cases, but not necessarily in all. For example, if someone fails to respond to an important, urgent situation because she is stressed, her failure to do so may only modify the extent to which one understands the relationship as impaired to a minimal extent. There are matters of judgment involved in making sense of how these circumstances bear upon one’s understanding of someone’s attitudes and their relative significance. Another condition that may appropriately influence relational impairment, and thus, blame, concerns an agent’s own psychological conflict. It is sometimes the case that a person struggles to do what is right and finds himself or herself conflicted between various concerns, judgments and desires. 

This sort of internal struggle may occur when someone recognizes what morality requires to some degree, but also is overcome by other desires that play a greater role in his or her reasoning. The prominence of certain interests in someone’s reasoning may show a failure to

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16 It is a reasonable question to ask how one can have a partial or obscured recognition of morality’s force. It is also worth wondering how to make sense of the everyday moral mistakes that each of us seem to make. It seems to me that one may recognize certain considerations as important in one sense while failing to recognize this importance in another sense, i.e. practically. For example, even if one recognizes that moral considerations, let’s call them ‘M’ are more important in comparison to other considerations, X, consideration X may be reflected as more significant in a practical sense when one acts. One may betray someone while recognizing this is an inappropriate response because of the stringency of moral considerations. I am tempted to say something that may be no more helpful than the aforementioned observation: a full and proper recognition of morality will mean that certain considerations become
appreciate morality. The degree to which one’s evaluations are incompatible with this appreciation depends on their content. If, for example, one’s interest in achieving great success and one becomes distracted from recognizing and acting upon fulfilling one’s other duties, this will not necessarily show that one does not recognize normative standards as significant. It is an open question as to what level of distraction should be considered to be compatible with the proper appreciation of morality. Still, this interest is not necessarily incompatible with recognizing morality. In contrast, other conflicts would, because of their content be clearly incompatible with the recognition of moral considerations. For example, this would be the case if the incompatibility arose as a result of sadistic or malevolent desires.

If we take seriously the fact that different sorts of internal conflicts may either be clearly contrary to morality or instead, embody a conflict that is more benign, then this should influence the extent to which the relationship is understood as impaired. Both Scanlon and Robert Adams defend accounts of blame recognizing that some internal conflicts may be relevant to blame, even though the presence of these conflicts do not make the blame itself inappropriate or unfair. For example, Adams speaks of giving someone “credit” for trying to overcome his manifest practically, in action. Still, one may only recognize morality’s stringency only partially when this does not occur.

Although I will be focusing more how an agent sees reasons as opposed to speaking in terms of desires, Arpaly characterizes moral concern in terms of desire: “What does being deeply or strongly concerned for something, or being more concerned for something than someone else, amount to? I take concern to be a form of desire. To say that a person acts out of moral concern is to say that a person acts out of an intrinsic (noninstrumental) desire to follow (that which in fact is) morality, or a noninstrumental desire to take the course of action that has those features that make actions morally right.” Arpaly, Unprincipled Virtue, 84.

A similar sort of distinction can be found in Arpaly, Unprincipled Virtue, 143.

Of the man who disowns his racist thoughts, Scanlon writes: “We may suppose that when such a thought occurs to him he is appalled by it and he rejects these thoughts as mistaken and shameful. But they continue to occur nonetheless. The fact that these reactions are contrary to his considered judgment – that he “disowns them” makes a significant difference to our assessment of this person. It changes the overall picture of what he is like. But it does not erase the relevance of those attitudes altogether. They are still attributable to him, and their occurrence is still a moral defect. That is why he is right to be disturbed and shamed by them. Perhaps they do not rise to the level of
persistent faults. While he agrees that blameworthy faults are still attributable to the struggling individual and that they are morally responsible, he still sees some appropriate relation between this individual’s struggle and the degree or character of blame.20

The significance of an agent’s attitudes and the extent to which those attitudes impair a relationship will, of course, also depend upon the relationship within which they are situated.21 Imagine a situation where a woman is perusing magazines in a drugstore. An older man notices her scanning the News section and calls over, “The women’s magazines are over there,” pointing to the Fashion and Decor section, but then catches himself with “I mean…sorry, my bad”. The woman may roll her eyes at this comment, recognizing it as disrespectful, and, perhaps, largely as the product of a bygone era, but be relatively undisturbed by what has transpired. If this situation was different and the woman was the man’s adult granddaughter, his comment would remain disrespectful, but the significance of this attitude for the relationship will likely be different. In this latter case, even though the granddaughter may recognize the influences of bygone eras on her grandfather, the fact of his disrespect may be particularly significant, especially if she feels that she has shown ample evidence that she is the kind of woman who is interested in matters that extend beyond fashion or the home. The attitude shows disrespect in either case, but it should seem to have greater significance for the relationship in the second case,

20 “Trying to pay attention to other people’s feelings will not necessarily be successful, if one is insensitive or afraid of emotions. And trying to assess one’s own abilities and accomplishments accurately may not keep one from thinking too highly of oneself, if one is vain. We do give people credit for trying in these matters, but we still regard the failure to notice other people’s feelings or one’s own deficiencies as a fault – and a fault that lies within the domain of ethics.” Robert Adams, “Involuntary Sins,” The Philosophical Review 94, no.1 (1985): 19.

21 Scanlon, Moral Dimensions, 53–54.
in part because there simply is more of a robust, involved relationship to be had between the woman and her grandfather than between the woman and a stranger.\textsuperscript{22}

Another consideration that may appropriately influence blame is the history of a relationship and whether the person wronged has also demonstrated similar attitudes or committed similar wrongs against the person he or she seeks to blame. Although one person’s past conduct does not change another’s blameworthiness, i.e. the fact that they have violated some relational norm, it may reasonably change the reasons that one has to blame, or the extent that one blames.\textsuperscript{23} If Agent A has already impaired the relationship with actions similar to those committed by Agent B, then although he may blame B for his wrongdoing, it would be wrong for him to treat the impairment as though it had newly blemished previously unimpaired relations. The past wrongdoer, now wronged, also has less reason to see this blameworthy, normative violation as reason to dramatically alter his attitudes towards the other, given that he too has shown a proclivity to acting in similar ways. Angela Smith rightly acknowledges that if one shares a moral fault with another, then there is a change in one’s standing to feel or express the reproach or indignation that one might otherwise feel. Although I do not think that it would be inappropriate to adjust one’s attitudes towards someone with a shared fault, for example, recognizing that one can no longer trust that person or will no longer confide in him or her, I do

\textsuperscript{22}One objection to this way of construing this situation is that it is also the case that we can be more tolerant of others the closer we are to them. This is likely so, especially when the incident is atypical and infrequent. If this interchange becomes one of many wherein the same attitude is made apparent, then my point seems clearer. An attitude of persistent disrespect from a close intimate will and likely should ultimately mean that one understands the relationship as impaired and adjusts one’s attitudes and intentions towards that person. It may not be that the granddaughter is unable to have a relationship with her grandfather, but she may, for example, be less likely to seek support and advice about her future career prospects.

\textsuperscript{23}My thought is here inspired by Scanlon’s explanation of someone’s “standing to blame” in light of wrongdoing. I believe that Scanlon’s strongest reason for thinking that past actions may influence standing to blame is articulated in the following statement: [If I have been late in the past], “I cannot claim that that the attitudes revealed in your willingness to stand me up constitute an impairment in our relations, because the mutual expectations and intentions that constitute those relations were already impaired in my own similar attitudes, revealed repeatedly in my past conduct.” Scanlon, \textit{Moral Dimensions}, 176.
agree that indignant criticism does seem inappropriate for the reasons that Smith notes. I also agree that as a general principle, one ought to spend time attending to one’s own failings before attending to those of others.\textsuperscript{24}

Furthermore, if a wrongdoer is already attending to his or her own failings, this too may change the blame that is appropriate. Even if this change does not alter the fact that the relationship has been impaired, it may change extent to which one continues to see it as impaired. In addition, it will likely also change the extent to which a reproach or a demand for explanation is appropriate given that the wrongdoer already recognizes the nature of her wrong. I will elaborate on this point further when I discuss expressions of blame in my subsequent chapters.\textsuperscript{25} The attitudes of the blameworthy agent, the circumstances in which they take place, the relationship within which they occur and the history of a relationship, including past wrongs, are a few of the considerations that may reasonably thought to influence blame.\textsuperscript{26} I have thought it important to review how some of these considerations or circumstances appropriately influence blame in order to distinguish them from the circumstances and considerations cited in the UV argument. Even though these considerations can be justifiably relevant to blame, they remain distinct from the claim of the UV argument that poor formative circumstances can make blame unfair.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 482.
\textsuperscript{26} Note that one can speak of the burden of being blamed versus not being blamed, but one can also speak of the burden associated with being blamed in a certain way or to a certain extent. One may be subjected to blame to different extents. There is some resonance that comes with speaking of the “strength” or “degree” of blame, although that implies that blame can be described in terms of something like the straightforward metric of more or less physical force. Although I think that many of us have experienced blame as more or less forceful, it may be more appropriate to speak of blame as being modified in different ways along with different factors opposed to the \textit{intensity} of blame.
IV. The UV Argument and the Unfairness Claim

I will now turn to a closer consideration and assessment of what I have referred to earlier as the Unfair Victim (UV) argument. In particular, I am concerned with its contention that a person’s lack of control over his or her formative circumstances are such that they can make blame unfair. The UV makes two main claims about blame: First, there is the claim that blame is something that people have reason to want to avoid because blame involves being burdened by being the object of certain negative emotions and sanctions. I will consider this matter in greater depth in the last section of the chapter. Second, it is claimed that someone’s unfortunate circumstances, particularly poor formative circumstances, are relevant to blame insofar as they can make blame unfair.

Earlier, I described the UV argument as taking the following general form: Agent (A) is subject to negative, uncontrollable circumstances (C) upon her attitudes and actions. C negatively influences A’s ability to comply with, or appropriately respond to, moral considerations (M). If A fails to respond appropriately to moral considerations because of circumstances C, then C makes it unfair either to blame, or to fail to modify blame in some way. The argument asserts that blame is unfair if the individual was negatively influenced by circumstances that hampered his or her ability to respond to moral reasons. The circumstances in question are thought to negatively influence one’s capacity to be a properly functioning moral agent, that is, someone who is properly responsive to the force and stringency of moral

\[27\] It may be more accurate to describe the Unfair Victim argument as referring to a class of arguments, since arguments with the same general premises are often presented in slightly different ways.
considerations. Thus, one can be considered a victim of sorts – that is, the victim of unfortunate circumstances – and one who may suffer the further injustice of blame.\textsuperscript{28}

The negative, formative influences being referenced could be various but the literature often includes social or cultural influences that have the potential to influence how someone comes to appreciate certain reasons. For example, being raised by parents who are prejudiced against minorities and having been raised within a thoroughly racist society could have negative implications for whether one recognizes the respect that is due to all persons. If one has been taught from an early age that only individuals from a certain cultural group or those possessing a certain skin colour are worthy of certain sorts of treatment, then this will not necessarily, but may regrettably inform one’s understanding of moral claims such as the universal respect that is owed to others. Likewise, being raised in a particular physical location or in a particular time period may influence someone’s understanding of moral considerations and claims. Cheshire Calhoun cites one such example of certain men from an older generation using language that they do not see as problematic, but that is actually sexist. This same language would likely be more widely perceived as sexist by men of a different generation. That is not to say that being raised in an earlier generation would make it impossible for a man to recognize that his language is demeaning or patronizing towards women. That being said, there may be prejudicial influences that are not present for those who belong to subsequent generations.\textsuperscript{29}

It is important to emphasize that these formative influences do not change whether or not the disrespectful attitude is mistaken or offensive according to the Scanlonian view that I favour.

\textsuperscript{28} For example, Wallace, \textit{Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments}, 164.

\textsuperscript{29} Cheshire Calhoun, “Responsibility and Reproach,” \textit{Ethics} 99, no.2 (1989): 405. The language does not have to be so clearly offensive, but rather, may involve something like the use of overly intimate names such as “love,” which may make women who are non-intimates feel uncomfortable.
That being said, I want to leave open the possibility that these influences may sometimes reasonably bear upon the appropriateness of blame or of expressions of blame. This may include how blame is expressed or the degree of condemnation issued. Is there reason, then, to think that blame is made *unfair* by these circumstances? Those who are proponents of UV-type arguments answer in the affirmative and, as I will demonstrate, their answer is one that depends upon what I believe to be an untenable account of blame. As previously seen, this account characterizes blame as not only a burden but also as a sort of burden that the individual ascribing blame chooses to place upon a blameworthy agent. In contrast, I contend that a more defensible view of blame rejects the view that the burdensome aspect of blame is best described as being located in the actions of the person who does the blaming. On the account that I favour, blame is best understood as a rational response to the reality of relational impairment, a reality that is made apparent by the attitudes of another person. Furthermore, because blame is an attitudinal adjustment, it may well be the case that it is never expressed. An example may help to bring out these differences between these accounts of blame and will, I hope, cast doubt upon the claims of UV argument with regard to the unfairness of blame, owing to the unfortunate nature of certain circumstances.

Consider the case of poor Sally, an individual who is denied employment because of the influences of the past on who she has become. In this case, I will treat blame as analogous to the assessment that someone is an unfit employee and the associated outcome of being denied a job. Sally is someone who has been raised in unfortunate circumstances with little socialization and few opportunities to develop the social skills required on the job market. In short, her experiences have left her ill-equipped to successfully interact with others. She applies for a job and is disappointed to learn that she has been denied the position because of her unfortunate lack
of qualifications, including her sub-par communication skills. Is her rejection unfair because the conditions that led to her being denied could be described as unfair? Her plight might perhaps be described as unfair in some looser, global sense of the word given the fact that Sally was negatively influenced in ways that leave her unable to succeed in fairly commonplace social situations. Still, based on the job requirements and the reasonable standards of competency outlined in the posting, the denial itself would not actually be unfair. For, if the qualifications were unreasonable and included, for example, the requirement that the recruit be a redhead or weigh a certain amount in order to be considered for the position, then rejection on these grounds would indeed be unfair. The unfairness would arise from the fact that the standards associated with gaining access to the position are, in themselves, irrelevant to the position. In Sally’s case by contrast, the standards themselves are not irrelevant and thus, not unfair. While her circumstances could be loosely described as unfair, it is likely more appropriate to consider them unfortunate.30

Unfortunate as Sally’s plight may seem, I believe that there is good reason for rejecting the claim that her bad luck in being exposed to, or conversely, deprived of certain experiences make her denial of employment unfair. Likewise, judgments of someone’s blameworthiness should not be influenced by prior circumstances that lead to a propensity for wrongdoing. My rejection of the preceding claim is, of course, influenced by my previously described, favoured account of blame. On this account of blame, blame is not best described as itself a form of punishment, though I agree that various punishing actions may sometimes be associated with or

30 I use the term ‘unfairness’ here fairly loosely. Fairness is more commonly associated with the distribution of certain opportunities, burdens or benefits. Although it may be regrettable that Sally has to suffer from a situation that she could not control, it could not be said that she was owed a better childhood or better formative circumstances. There is no institution to which to appeal that is dividing up benefits and burdens or distributing opportunities.
arise in conjunction with blame.\textsuperscript{31} If blame were best understood as a form of punishment, this would indeed change the sense in which blame could be understood as unfair. As previously noted, I believe that blame is best described by the attitudinal adjustment that it necessarily involves as opposed to any contingent expressions, emotions or actions. Just as certain information about Sally rightly influences how one thinks of her and acts towards her, a judgment of blameworthiness ought to influence one’s attitudes and intentions toward those who are blameworthy, other things being equal.\textsuperscript{32} The recognition of certain facts, including that X possesses or lacks certain attitudes, makes appropriate certain attitudes, intentions, and actions.\textsuperscript{33}

Although I am critical of some aspects of the UV argument, I do not disagree with all of its sentiments. For example, I agree that if someone is subject to conditions that negatively influence her moral agency, that it is right to judge it unfortunate. I also agree that these negative circumstances could be described as burdensome; burdens that make it more difficult to recognize moral reasons. To say that the ensuing blame is an unfair burden presupposes a view of blame as an activity involving the just distribution of burdens upon wrongdoers. It is important to note that unlike the goods, burdens or opportunities distributed by an entity like a

\textsuperscript{31} I understand punishment, very generally, as the imposition of some suffering or loss to serve as retribution. My understanding of blame places the central “force” of blame in the judgment of blameworthiness. This is not to say that blame can be associated with other punishing behaviours – perhaps physically or emotionally abusing the wrongdoer. It is also not to minimize the significance and negative impact of these behaviours. The main point I wish to make is that various emotions and actions associated with blame still rely on the judgment of blameworthiness for the weightiness or what has been described as the “force” of blame. It may be unpleasant to be treated badly, but this bad treatment can neither be understood as a punishment nor as being associated with blame if the agent is unaware of the fact that the other person either considers them blameworthy, or perhaps, has individual grounds for thinking them blameworthy. Furthermore, actions such as avoidance that are often associated with blame are frequently undertaken when someone recognizes that they have reason to see a relationship as changed in light of wrongdoing. The avoidance is not meant to serve as retribution, but rather, as simply the result of a relationship that has been changed.

\textsuperscript{32} Note the conditions that make it appropriate to modify blame and that may affect someone’s standing to blame, as mentioned above.

\textsuperscript{33} Pamela Hieronymi makes the same claims about distrust. Although it may seem unfair that someone has been exposed to the sorts of experiences that encouraged unreliability, it would not be unfair to distrust her. Pamela Hieronymi, “The Force and Fairness of Blame,” \textit{Philosophical Perspectives} 18, no. 1 (2004): 119.
political institution, there is no sense in which the burdens associated with interpersonal blame are being distributed by a similar institution. It is indeed unfortunate that some individuals are in the position of being subject to negative influences and having to struggle against them. It is also important to realize that one can recognize this state of affairs as unfortunate without claiming that blame itself is unfair in light of such influences. There are still grounds for thinking that relations with others are impaired in circumstances where someone’s poor formative influences have affected her attitudes and actions.  

In the preceding section of the chapter, I have sought to identify the basic appeal of the claim that blame is unfair, particularly when someone has been negatively influenced by certain uncontrollable, formative circumstances. I have maintained that the unfairness of being subject to or a victim of unfortunate formative circumstances does have any straightforward bearing upon claims concerning blameworthiness or blame. If someone is disrespectful to others, this agent’s act is blameworthy because it constitutes a normative violation. Despite my disagreements with the way that proponents of UV argument view blame, I do believe that knowledge of these unfortunate circumstances may have some role to play in the character of certain blaming attitudes, in the treatment of others and in the way in which blame may be appropriately expressed. I will explain why this is in the next chapter when I consider the role that poor formative circumstances play in the recognition of moral reasons. My next task is to consider a

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This is not to say that such individuals are those to whom we take an objective attitude on Strawson’s account. One has the sense that these individuals are those that cannot respond to reasons at all, and that they are a problem to be managed. Peter Strawson writes: “What I want to contrast is the attitude (or range of attitudes) of involvement or participation in a human relationship, on the one hand, and what might be called the objective attitude (or range of attitudes) to another human being, on the other. Even in the same situation, I must add, they are not altogether exclusive of each other; but they are, profoundly, opposed to each other. To adopt the objective attitude to another human being is to see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense, might be called treatment; as something certainly to be taken account, perhaps precautionary account, of; to be managed or handled or cured or trained; perhaps simply to be avoided, though this gerundive is not peculiar to cases of objectivity of attitude.” Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” 9.
further problematic aspect of the UV’s account of blame: the burdensome aspect of blame and, in what sense and for what reasons, blame can be considered burdensome.

V. The Burdensome Aspect of Blame

As I noted earlier, the UV argument claims that there is something burdensome about blame, and a negative experience associated with one’s awareness of being blamed. I believe that this rings true, as there are good reasons for not wanting to be subject to blame. In the account that I defend, justified blame is indicative of one having violated a particular important relational and/or moral standard. Blame involves the negative judgments of others and is often accompanied by being the subject of unpleasant behaviour.\(^\text{35}\) Blame is sometimes described as having a unique ‘force’ that is burdensome.\(^\text{36}\) There is a sense in which I agree insofar as I affirm that blame can be burdensome, but the way that I understand the characteristic burden of blame differs from proponents of the UV argument. Indeed, these proponents often state that the burden of blame resides in the reactive attitudes to which one is subject when one is blamed. By contrast, my understanding of the burden of blame is naturally influenced by my understanding of blame as being constituted by certain judgments. While I do not posit that blame need only be

\(^{35}\) I am focusing primarily on cases in which an individual has violated some standard that impairs his or her relations with others, that is recognized in some way by the other. The so-called burden of blame is one that is experienced by the violator primarily in light of his or her interactions with others. I am focusing on these cases, at least initially, because they seem to be more central to the UV argument’s claim that blame involves doing something to someone else. It will become more apparent throughout the course of my dissertation that I believe that the most vexing aspect of blame is an agent’s recognition of the judgment that others have of her, and of the significance of that judgment for her relation with others. I think that it is also certainly true that an agent can come to recognize both her wrongdoing and its significance independently of others. If so, it may turn out to be that the weightiness of blame, sometimes construed as the burden of blame, does not actually require the recognition of someone else’s attitudes. In other words, blame and the experience of a burden may not have to involve others at all. That being said, I believe that the main concern of the UV argument is with cases wherein blame is described as something that is an attitude, often expressed in some way that is directed from one person to another.

\(^{36}\) Hieronymi cites, in particular, the views of Wallace, who she interprets as citing the force of blame in the sanctioning behaviour associated with the reactive attitudes and of Watson, who she describes as citing the force of blame as residing in the accountability versus aretaic face of moral responsibility characterized by the making of certain demands and by emotions such as resentment and indignation. Hieronymi, “The Force and Fairness of Blame,” 117.
defined in terms of certain judgments, I will argue that blame is importantly defined by these judgments.

I favour the view, articulated by Pamela Hieronymi, that the significance of these judgments for our relations with others, if recognized by the wrongdoer, is what lends what could be metaphorically described as a distinctive force, burden or weightiness to blame. I will explain my reasons for favouring this view after canvassing other possibilities that may be thought to account for the unique burden of blame. I agree with the proponents of the UV argument insofar as I believe that there are other burdens associated with blame that may be experienced whether or not the agent is able to recognize the significance of blame. However, I disagree that these burdens constitute the sort of distinctive force associated with blame, just as I reject the conclusion that these burdens are necessarily unfair in light of poor formative circumstances that have influenced wrongdoing. The term “burden” can be employed in various ways. For example, it can be employed in a fairly neutral manner to refer to something heavy or metaphorically “weighty,” such as coming to recognize certain realities or facts like one’s mortality or the state of one’s relationship or life prospects. The term can also be used to refer to the fairness of certain circumstances and to imply the unfairness of blame, although I will maintain that the judgments involved in blame are not unfair wherever they are justified.

Again, the cases that I use to consider how blame is burdensome and whether it is unfair are cases wherein wrongdoing has occurred and can be properly attributed to a particular agent in a way that is normatively relevant. The actions and attitudes that can be attributed to others and

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38 I am using ‘wrongdoing’ in a looser sense than it is sometimes used. For example, Scanlon uses “wrongdoing” to refer to violations understood in terms of what we owe to each other. Scanlon, Moral Dimensions, 124. I use it more
for which they are responsible must, to put it briefly, satisfy the condition of being connected
with one’s underlying judgments, or perhaps less strongly, assessments that one can be called
upon to justify. 39 I will now turn to the main task of this section: the assessment of what sorts of
considerations constitute the burdens associated with blame, what sorts of burdens constitute the
characteristic ‘force’ of blame, and what this exploration might illumine about the matter of
blame’s unfairness.

If there are burdens associated with blame, how are they best characterized? Earlier I
remarked that blame is, of course, something that many of us find difficult and undesirable.
When we are blamed, especially when we know and accept that we have done something wrong,
we may experience blame as something unbearable. Although characterizing blame as
burdensome may seem uncontroversial, it is still worth asking two more specific sets of
questions about the burden of blame. First, what are the specific reasons for thinking that blame

39 This is essentially a version of Angela Smith’s Rational Relations view concerning moral responsibility. “What
matters, on this account, is whether an action or attitude is normatively connected to a person’s underlying
judgments in such a way that she can, in principle, be called upon to defend it with reasons and acknowledge fault if
an adequate defense cannot be provided.” Angela Smith, “Control, Responsibility, and Moral Assessment,”
Philosophical Studies 138, no. 3 (2008), 370. I make some distinction here between ‘judgments’ and ‘assessments’
because I want to acknowledge that there is some distinction to be made between the conclusion one reaches or the
decision one makes as a result of conscious deliberations and those that are made with less awareness. I do not mean
to imply anything other than the fact that these are slightly different phenomena from the perspective of an agent,
even if there is no relevant difference between them when it comes to moral responsibility. It may also serve to help
those who think that control is required for something to be called a judgment to be better able to appreciate the
argument, even if they would object to the way in which a particular term is being used. Nomy Arpaly speaks of
various different processes as being able to be subsumed under the description of “responding to a reason” or
“acting for a reason” whether or not the process involves deliberation. It seems to me that like Smith, what Arpaly
cares about when it comes to moral responsibility is whether an act or attitude is normatively connected to an
agent’s recognition of reasons. Arpaly, Unprincipled Virtue, 51. Scanlon holds a similar view: “It would make no
sense to criticize someone in this way, or to demand such responses, for something that is not even in principle
sensitive to his or her judgment. “Why are you so tall?” cannot be a moral criticism. As I have said, however, this
does not mean that moral criticism applies only to actions or attitudes that arise directly from an agent’s conscious
judgments. A person can be criticized, and asked to provide justification or acknowledgment and apology, for things
that seem to have been done inadvertently in a situation in which advertence is called for. Being in principle “under
the control of reason,” and arising from conscious judgment or choice, are two different things.” T. M. Scanlon,
can be described as burdensome? Are they good reasons? Secondly, if blame can indeed be characterized as burdensome, are there cases where the burden of blame ought to be considered to be unfair?

I will begin with the first set of questions, putting aside for the moment the question of unfairness. Blame can indeed be considered as undesirable and painful, and this is sometimes all that is meant by referring to something as burdensome. That blame is often considered difficult is uncontroversial, but why it is considered so is more controversial. For example, it is accepted by many that the distinct burden of blame can be explained in terms of the emotions to which one is subject when one is blamed. Some may cite the burden as residing in the actions to which may be subject when one is blamed, others may point to the judgments associated with blame, or some combination thereof. An obvious place to start the discussion is to consider the role that emotions play in blame and the burden they may present to the one who is blamed. The literature often points to the undesirability of being subject to certain emotions or to Strawsonian reactive attitudes such indignation or resentment. Strawson claims that such attitudes only arise in the context of interpersonal relationships wherein one can demand and expect a degree of goodwill from others. These relationships and the reactive attitudes with which they are associated are drawn in contrast to interactions with others toward whom one adopts not a participant reactive attitude, but rather, an objective attitude. Those who are not properly the objects of reactive attitudes are unable to make the sort of evaluations that one could typically expect of fellow rational beings. Those to whom one can only take an objective attitude are the kinds of persons from whom, it seems, one cannot rightly expect or demand goodwill and thus, Strawson says of such individuals: “though you may fight him, you cannot quarrel with him, and though you may

talk to him, even negotiate with him, you cannot reason with him.”  

41 He or she is, in Strawson’s words, something “to be managed or handled or cured or trained.”  

42 There is some sense in which his claim is understandable, but it is difficult to imagine the kinds of persons who cannot be considered the object of resentment or about whom judgments of blame are wholly inapplicable and normatively inappropriate. How to characterize such individuals is, of course, a matter of great debate and discussion. These are not merely imperfect moral agents who fail to act consistently on the basis of their judgments. If so, objective attitudes would be widespread and relationships be made nearly impossible. As a way of marking this distinction, some have spoken, somewhat poetically of an individual’s status as a member of the “moral community.”  

43 To be properly subject to resentment and indignation is, on a Strawsonian account, to be a certain sort of agent. It is to be one to whom one can feel gratitude and certain sorts of love, but one who may be the object of resentment or indignation.  

44 In considering whether the burden of blame arises from being subject to such emotions, one must reflect on what it is about the experience that is so adverse, and whether all who are subject to these emotions are saddled with the same burdens. To begin with, not all subjects of negative emotions will be negatively affected or burdened. Depending on the situation, someone may brush off another’s resentment towards her, so it does not seem that being subject to the emotion itself is necessarily burdensome. In order to consider other sources of this burden, it will be helpful to consider some of what Strawson and his interpreters say about the nature of these

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41 Ibid., 9.
42 Ibid., 9.
emotions. Certain classes of emotions seem to express, or perhaps constitute, the fact that individuals are being held to expectations of goodwill that are, in a real sense, demanded of them.\textsuperscript{45} The violation of the standards that constitute and maintain a relationship make it appropriate to feel resentful at someone’s falling short of these standards. Emotions such as resentment that, depending on one’s view, are either constitutive of or frequently associated with blame often indicate the violation of relational norms that may include the maintenance of trust, the expression of good will, and the like.

Gary Watson and R. Jay Wallace characterize the reactive attitudes or blame more generally as not only responding to a violation, but importantly, as embodying and expressing a demand that one abide by certain prohibitions or requirements.\textsuperscript{46} These demands could be described as pertaining not only to actions, but also to attitudes and standing intentions. They are earmarked to the sort of relation in which one stands to others. For instance, a friend may demand that fellow friends generally come to his aid, that they do so not merely for instrumental reasons and that they have a standing intention to provide aid in this way. These same demands will not likely and should not likely, be required of non-friends.\textsuperscript{47} They are demands placed upon

\textsuperscript{45} “In general, we demand some degree of goodwill or regard on the part of those who stand in these relationships with us, though the forms we require it to take vary widely in different connections. The range and intensity of our reactive attitudes towards goodwill, its absence or its opposite vary no less widely.” Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” 6.

\textsuperscript{46} “The negative reactive attitudes express a moral demand, a demand for reasonable regard. “ Watson, “Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme,”229. Wallace speaks of the specific sort of demand involving reactive attitudes: “In holding them [my students] to these various expectations, I often believe that the expectations will be fulfilled. Thus I generally believe that my students will not in fact attempt to blackmail me. But even when a belief of this sort is present, it does not capture what is centrally involved in holding a person to an expectation, or in making a demand of the person. The crucial element, I would suggest, is attitudinal: to hold someone to an expectation is essentially to be susceptible to a certain range of emotions in the case that the expectation is not fulfilled, or to believe that the violation of the expectation would make it appropriate for one to be subject to those emotions. For reasons that will become clear in the course of my discussion, we may refer to this stance of holding someone to an expectation as a "quasievaluative" stance.” Wallace, Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments, 21.

\textsuperscript{47} I will admit that I am unsure of the relationship between obligations, demands and explanations. I am conflicted about whether it can be defensibly argued that one can demand not only that others act in certain ways, but also, that
an agent about how she ought to act and/or the attitudes that she ought to hold. These demands are rooted in the normative expectations that one has of others depending on the nature of the relationship. They are not only made of intimates, but also of strangers – for example, that they respect others and do them no harm.

Blame is also associated with other sorts of demands that apply, more specifically, to instances of wrongdoing. Often, there are certain demands that are often made after someone has committed a wrong and these include demands of explanation, justification or apology. For example, Hieronymi writes of the actions and attitudes involved in blame as either requiring the person who is blamed to show that she has not committed a wrong, or if she has, that she acknowledge her wrongdoing, perhaps through a sincere apology, a commitment to reforming herself or to work at repairing what has been broken.\(^\text{48}\) Similarly, Smith speaks of a “justificatory demand” implicit in moral criticism, such that individuals who are blamed can be called upon to justify their actions to others with whom they stand in relation – either as strangers, but fellow human beings or as intimates.\(^\text{49}\) The thinking is that if one is the proper

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they have certain attitudes. For example, in colloquial terms, one may say both “you ought to help me more” and also, “you ought to care more about me.” Both the action of aid and the attitude of care may be involved in the standards of a healthy relationship. My inclination is to think that an explanation can be asked for in the case of someone who, for example, always puts his trivial needs before the significant needs of his friends, even though he isn’t obliged to help his friend. Although an uncaring attitude indicates a falling short of certain relational standards, it doesn’t seem to be something for which an explanation can obviously be given. That being said, this may not be the correct conclusion to draw about attitudes more generally. It does seem as though some explanation can be demanded from someone who, for example, holds the belief and has corresponding prejudicial attitudes based on his conviction that one group of people is inferior to or less valuable than another. It does not seem that a similar explanation can be demanded from someone who simply finds that they do not care for someone as much as they once did.

Scanlon refers to the way in which at least standards and obligations come apart as well as the way in which standards can make reference to attitudes: “In addition to these intentions and dispositions to behave in certain ways (to fulfill what might be called the obligations of friendship), being a friend involves being disposed to certain feelings: to take pleasure in the friend’s company, to hope that things go well for the friend and to take pleasure in their going well when they do. A friend is not obligated to have such hopes or feelings, but a person who fails to have then, if a friend at all, is a deficient one.” Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 132.


\(^\text{49}\) Smith, “Control, Responsibility, and Moral Assessment,” 383.
subject of blame – whether in the form of a reactive attitude or otherwise – it is because one’s actions or attitudes are a reflection of one’s rational assessments: something that one can be called upon to defend and justify.\textsuperscript{50} These rational demands are another possible way of explaining the burdensome dimensions of blame, though more must be said in order to explain why this would be the case.

It will be helpful to consider an example exploring how and whether these demands can be construed as a burden. Someone, let us call her Wendy, has certain reasonable expectations of her friends and feels resentment toward her friend Beatrice for her act of betrayal. What does this resentment show and how is it indicative of a demand, if any? On a Scanlonian account resentment seems to show, at the very least, that Wendy considers her relationship with Beatrice to be governed by certain standards that Beatrice has violated. Indeed, Wendy’s resentment confirms her belief that Wendy thinks that Beatrice is someone from whom certain treatment can be demanded due to the kind of agent she is and the norms governing their relationship. Although demands may be thought to be burdensome, it also seems as though Wendy’s demands also indicate something that speaks positively of Beatrice. Wendy considers Beatrice as someone with whom she can reason; someone with whom, in principle, she can stand in certain sort of relations. Yet these observations, though reasonable, might rightly be described as cold comfort from the point of view of the person who is resented or otherwise blamed. Few would construe being subject to blame, or these associated emotions and demands as a \textit{good} thing, even if they indicate something positive about how someone views one as an agent. Still, what exactly is it about being subject to certain demands that is burdensome? As mentioned earlier by Hieronymi and Smith, being subject to certain demands often has practical implications. Although it may be

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 386.; Scanlon, \textit{What We Owe to Each Other}, 289.
the case that one is held to certain expectations and demands without being aware of this fact, it is often the case that these expectations influence the treatment that one receives from others.

Watson remarks that there are a variety of expressions and treatments that one is often subject to when blamed. He observes that regarding people as responsible, and thus as a possible object of blame also is evidenced by certain practical treatment:

Regarding people as responsible agents is evidently not just a matter of belief. So regarding them means something in practice. It is shown in an embrace of a thank you, in an act of reprisal or obscene gesture, in a feeling of resentment or sense of obligation, in an apology or a demand for apology. To regard people as responsible agents is to treat them in certain ways.  

Watson claims that evidence of certain actions and treatment are an important part of understanding what it means to consider someone morally responsible. Wallace also thinks that it is natural for blame to be expressed in certain actions and sanctioning behaviour including avoidance, denunciation or reproach. Being subject to this treatment may indeed seem clearly burdensome, for who wants to be avoided, be the recipient of an obscene gesture, or be reproached? Still, one can be subject to similar behaviour without being blamed. For example, one may be subject to an obscene gesture because of one’s gender or race or be avoided because

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52 Wallace writes about the fact that people who are considered morally responsible are liable to more than “simple blame” but also to various sanctioning responses: “People who are morally responsible may be made to answer for their actions, in the sense that their actions render them liable to certain kinds of distinctively moral responses. These responses include most saliently the response of moral blame, which is called for when the responsible agent has done something morally wrong, but they extend beyond simple blame to include a range of sanctioning responses as well, such as avoidance, reproach, scolding, denunciation, remonstration, and (at the limit) punishment. Moral blame and moral sanction may thus be thought of as the special kinds of appraisal to which morally responsible agents are open, and the hallmark of holding people responsible will be a tendency to respond to them with these forms of appraisal.” Wallace, Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments, 54.
others don’t enjoy one’s company and the like, all without being blamed for some normative violation. If being subject to these acts is tantamount to the burden of blame, then it seems that there is nothing characteristic or unique about this burden as compared to the burden of being treated in certain ways. The claim that being subject to certain actions that may or may not arise from being subject to certain demands is the source of the burden of blame stands in tension with the claim that there is a unique burden associated with blame. Another viable possibility is that the burden of blame is best understood as having to do with the recognition that one is subject to certain demands when one is blamed, although there are also reasons to be wary of this proposal. Comparing examples will once again be a useful way to consider this option.

Two cases will be compared: in both cases, the individual is being blamed and is aware that she is being blamed in relation to certain standards or demands that the other considers them to have violated. Although the individual is subject to demands in both cases, in case A, these demands are rejected as unreasonable and in another, they are accepted as reasonable. In case A, Rita is subject to resentment and associated behaviour such as avoidance and the demand that she explain her behaviour to her friend, Felicity. Felicity claims that Rita ought to treat her with greater respect, having learned that Rita is badmouthing her and mocking her behind her back. Rita rejects Felicity’s demands as unreasonable. Case B is the same as case A, with the

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53 Wallace speaks of deep appraisal: “To hold people morally responsible for their actions is to see them as open to a kind of deep appraisal different from that involved in treating people as autonomous, a kind of appraisal that is presumptively moral in its quality and force. An account of what it is to hold people responsible must locate and explain this special kind of appraisal.” Wallace, Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments, 53–54.

Wolf refers to moral responsibility as a species of “deep responsibility” (as opposed to superficial responsibility that used to merely identify a causal agent associated with some event). “When we hold an individual morally responsible for some event, we are doing more than identifying her particularly crucial role in the causal series that brings about the event in question. We are regarding her as a fit subject for credit or discredit on the basis of the role she plays. When, in this context, we consider an individual worthy of blame or of praise, we are not merely judging the moral quality of the event with which the individual is so intimately associated; we are judging the moral quality of the individual herself in some more focused, noninstrumental, and seemingly more serious way.” Susan Wolf, Freedom Within Reason. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 41.
difference that Rita instead accepts Felicity’s demands as justifiable. In both cases, Rita is subject to the unpleasant experience of her friend feeling resentment towards her, and instead of enjoying her company, now finds herself avoided. This is a burden, if one can call it that, which does not seem to vary between the two cases. There also seems to be a difference that does indeed affect whether or not another sort of burden is felt in each case. It seems as though the matter of whether one accepts certain demands accounts for this difference.

In case A as well as case B, one can imagine Rita feeling some discomfort and awkwardness of being the target of any emotions and acts involved in being blamed. Being subject to these occurrences may disrupt her life and deprive her of the good things that accompanied what she previously considered to be a valuable friendship. In case A, Rita may also experience frustration over being blamed for what she considers to be an unreasonable demand on the part of her friend. In contrast, Rita would not experience this frustration in case B. The fact that, in the first case, Rita objects to her friend’s demands would seem to modify the sense in which the demand could act as a burden. If she doesn’t accept the justifiability of Felicity’s demand and rejects her reasons for taking them seriously, then although the relationship can still be described as impaired and she may still be subject to all these other unpleasant forms of treatment, it would be unlikely that she would be burdened in others ways. She would not, for example, seem to be burdened in the way that one may be if she accepts the significance of her violation in light of blame and the demands with which blame is associated. Additionally, she is not likely to feel certain emotions such as guilt. While it is true that guilt itself does not necessarily indicate that one accepts the standard as justifiable, this is the more

54 I take it to be the case that relationships can be describes as impaired independently of whether they are recognized as being impaired. Angela Smith describes the way in which guilt and other emotions are judgment sensitive. Angela Smith, “Guilty Thoughts” in Morality and the Emotions edited by Carla Bagnoli (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
unusual circumstance. It remains true that even if one still happens to feel some sense of guilt in this situation, one will not experience the unique burden that comes with recognizing that one has violated an important norm.

In contrast, in case B, there is unique burden that goes beyond negative treatment in light of certain expectations or demands. This particular burden involves the recognition that one has violated certain expectations that one accepts as being associated with justifiable norms and demands. It arises not from the discomfort that one suffers from certain contingent treatment, but rather, from recognizing the significance of this judgment. This judgment changes the relation in which one stands to other individuals, as well as to the person whom one has wronged. As a fellow rational being, one can, in principle, be called upon to explain oneself or admit that one fell short of certain norms. If a wrongdoer accepts and recognizes that she has fallen short of a normative requirement that is implicated in standing in relations of goodwill with others, she will understand this violation to be significant. When this is the case, the recognition could perhaps even be described as weighty or burdensome, although this does seems mostly to be a metaphorical way of describing one’s recognition of the significance of the

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55 For example, Wallace cites the Catholic guilt felt by a lapsed Catholic. Wallace, Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments, 43.

56 Scanlon writes that the significance of recognizing that one’s actions have altered a relationship: “But the primary significance of moral criticism lies not in what others may do in the future as a result of believing it, but rather in what is, if the criticism is correct, already the case. If I have injured someone by failing to take their interests into account in the way one should, then my relation with them is already altered by that fact, whatever they do.” Scanlon, What We Owe To Each Other, 272.

See also the earlier quote where Raskolnikov explains the suffering felt by those who recognize the gravity of their mistakes in Crime and Punishment.

57 I admit, I am not sure what might be required in these sorts of explanations or how they would necessarily alter blame. For example, the explanation that slipped and thus, tripped someone else would make it the case that one did no wrong. Alternatively, would evidence of an aktratic disposition count as an explanation we are called to give, even if it does not change the fact of wrongdoing? It seems that if wrongdoing has indeed occurred, then all explanations will just be a story of how this wrongdoing came to be. Perhaps this may be thought to be a basis upon which one ought to modify blame, even if the individual can still be held responsible as in the case of the akratic.
preceding judgment for one’s relations with others.\textsuperscript{58} If this is indeed a burden, it is a unique burden that arises in the case of B, but not A. It could be objected that whether or not one accepts the demands inherent in blame, the fact that one is subject to certain ill treatment in light of these demands is still what constitutes the characteristic burden of blame. This seems unlikely. There may be something disquieting about being subject to ill treatment when one fails to abide by the demands made by others who could not be said to be engaging in blame, at least in a morally relevant sense. Someone could think that one ought to decorate one’s home according to certain standards that one has violated or, if one is an artist, that one should create art in certain ways. One may be treated differently in regards to such standards, but these purported violations are not my main concern. My primary interest lies in the attitudes that could be said to be more centrally constitutive of our relations to others and the maintenance of these relations: respecting each others’ value as a fellow human being and demonstrating attitudes such as concern and trustworthiness that maintain the relationship at a more basic level. It may be claimed that it is uniquely burdensome to be subject to blame because of standards that someone else accepts as constitutive of a moral relationship or another relationship like friendship. The fact that someone else considers certain standards as a reasonable basis for blame does not seem sufficient to constitute the unique burden that some claim is felt in blame. Although some may be bothered by the recognition that they are being subject to this judgment, it seems just as likely that others remain unbothered and feel pity towards the person who is so mistaken in his views and who blames them on the basis of misguided or unreasonable expectations, be they so-called moral

\textsuperscript{58} Hieronymi associates this weight with the importance of standing in certain relations characterized by goodwill and mutual regard: “It seems quite plausible to me that standing in relations of mutual regard is of considerable importance to creatures like us. Thus the content of a judgment of ill will can carry a certain amount of force—despite being descriptive. If it is true, then you no longer stand in such a relationship. If you acknowledge its truth—if you make the judgment of yourself—that acknowledgement carries the corresponding sense of guilt. It also seems quite plausible that standing in relations in which the quality of one’s will is recognized, both by oneself and by others, is of considerable importance. Hieronymi, “The Force and Fairness of Blame,” 124.
standards or other standards. The characteristic burden of blame is one that seems to be
dependent not only on being blamed in relation to certain sorts of standards that are constitutive
of our relations with others, but also on whether one recognizes and accepts these standards as
significant and justifiable.

The burden associated with blame will seem to be diminished if one is unable to
appreciate the significance of the demands inherent in justified blame such as the significance of
the norms themselves, or perhaps, the importance of standing in relations of mutual regard. Only
those who accept the fact that their attitudes show something like a lack of respect and concern
and that this is significant will experience the sort of burden that seems uniquely characteristic to
recognizing that one has been blamed in response to attitudes or actions that legitimately impair
a relationship. The individual who does not recognize the significance of these standards may be
more apt to feel uncomfortable and to simply dismiss the blaming actions or attitudes of the
others. Though some individuals may fully recognize the significance of the attitude impaired
the relationship and another may not recognize it at all, it is worth noting that there are cases that
lie between these extremes.

Hieronymi provides an articulate account of this characteristic “force” of blame as being
dependent on the significance of certain judgments. In particular, the significance that a
judgment of wrongdoing has for rational beings who can be called upon to justify their
evaluations. 59 I too agree that the meaning of this judgment and its significance is a fact that does
not depend on whether or not this significance is acknowledged or recognized by the wrongdoer.
Despite the fact that I largely agree with this characterization of the “force” of blame, I believe
that there is an important distinction to be made in regards to the relation between the

significance of blame and the burden of blame. This distinction could be made clearer in Hieronymi’s discussion of blame’s characteristic force. There is a distinction worth making perspicuous between the significance of certain judgments and the experienced “weightiness” of burdensome aspect of blame. While I understand the significance of the judgments involved in blame as being agent-independent, I still understand the weighty or burdensome aspects of blame as being agent-dependent. Hieronymi does recognize that many of the hardships that individuals suffer as a result of blame are agent-dependent. She goes on to admit that her account of the characteristic force of blame doesn’t exhaust the force of blame, yet the extent to which certain aspects of that force are agent-independent or agent-dependent could perhaps be made clearer.

Consider a simple analogy: it may be the case that on any given day, a weightlifter lifts under, at par with, or above the Olympic standard for his sport. That is a matter of fact. If he is ignorant of how his lifting corresponds to the standard, or ignorant of the standard and unable to appreciate its significance then this will influence how he understands his own activities. This fact holds true, even though the standard endows his acts endowed with a certain significance, for example, above-par or below-par performance, a standard that is unaffected by the matter of his recognition. I believe that it is important to clearly distinguish between and clearly express these two aspects of blame – both the significance and the weightiness or burden, in order to attend to

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60 Hieronymi seems to recognize other factors as painful or burdensome in a sense that is dependent on the agent, such as whether the agent cares about the judgment understood as distinct from the characteristic force of that judgment. Interestingly enough on both her and my account, this judgment, which carries a certain force, could not be experienced as burdensome by many of those with which others are concerned (i.e. those who cannot fully appreciate moral reasons). There are times where she uses “force” in a sense that is agent independent and at other times in a sense that seems agent-dependent. For example, on p.126 she writes, “While I believe this judgment carries such force regardless of whether the person cares about it, let’s stipulate that this person does care about the opinion of others.” Elsewhere, she describes how the force of certain reactive attitudes can be dependent upon an agent’s reasoning in such a way that suggests that the force of these attitudes is dependent upon how the person who is blamed experiences someone else’s reasoning rather than solely on the reasoning of she who blames, if I have interpreted her correctly, 133. This differing use of ‘force’ could be further clarified to make explicit when this force is considered to be agent-dependent or independent and thus, whether the unfairness or lack thereof, is or is not dependent on facts about the agent.
their differences and to how they relate, so that it can be understood how they are employed in the UV argument.

There may be some sense in which there are unique burdens experienced by those who at least *partially* appreciate that they have violated an important norm, but who also recognize that they are unable to adequately conform to the normative demands. For example, consider the case of Unfortunate Ulrich. Ulrich finds it difficult to recognize and act upon moral considerations, perhaps through circumstances largely outside of his control. He has developed insensitivity to the needs of others but also recognizes, to some extent, that norms of care and respect are important. He sometimes attempts to act well towards others, but often fails. It would seem that Ulrich would not experience the characteristic burden of blame in the same way as someone who *fully* appreciates the significance of moral demands, but he may still feel some of this burden because he can recognize the importance of some of the demands, to some extent. He may also be subject to an additional, though less characteristic, burden associated with the recognition that he cannot easily comply with the standards that he himself recognizes to be in some sense significant. Ulrich is both seemingly unable to adequately comply with demands, but is unable to fully disregard the significance of others’ blame since he recognizes that these demands bear some significance and importance.

Indeed, it would indeed seem particularly frustrating to have to face certain expectations and demands that one recognizes to some degree and to also suffer the negative consequences of being unable to fulfill these demands. It is certainly regrettable that Ulrich would suffer in this way. At the same time, his circumstances could make the case that those who are his intimates should try to aid him so that he can better, and more easily, appreciate and conform to normative demands. Despite the fact that an individual may experience different sorts of burdens when
blamed, as long as that individual is someone who can respond to rational considerations and evidence in his or her judgments, when it comes to the appropriateness of the potentially burdensome demands, if that person is someone who, in Strawson’s words, ought to be reasoned with, rather than controlled, then blame remains appropriate. The aforementioned reflections also suggest that the characteristic, and arguably, most burdensome aspect of blame is only experienced by some individuals who are blamed: that is, those who recognize and accept the fact that their attitudes have impaired the relation in which they stand with others.

VI. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to introduce my project and the claims of the Unfair Victim argument, specifically the claim that blame is unfair when individuals are unable, or find it difficult to comply with morality as a result of uncontrollable influences on the kind of person that he or she becomes. In the first part of the chapter, I tried to distinguish the UV’s argument concerning the unfairness of blame from considerations that make it reasonable and appropriate to modify blame. I did this in order to more clearly position the locus of disagreement over the UV argument’s claim concerning the unfairness of blame. I also discussed the normativity of blame and the relational standards that help to define blame. In considering the claim that blame is unfair in the circumstances cited by the UV argument, I have sought to make it clear that although I recognize the unfortunate fact that some individuals have been exposed to negative

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61 Scanlon draws a distinction between the appropriateness of demanding that the agent give an explanation or try to justify himself to us, and the appropriateness of berating someone for not seeing what he, at the given moment, is unable to see and trying to make him do what may not be possible: “If a person holds a certain judgment-sensitive attitude, then, because this attitude is in principle sensitive to and dependent upon his judgment, it is appropriate in a general sense to ask him to defend it or to disown it. It is a separate question whether it is appropriate literally to demand of him that he acknowledge the force of reasons against the attitude he holds. If it becomes clear that he is unable to see the force of these reasons then it may be unreasonable to press this demand. But from the fact that such acts of criticism would be unreasonable it would not follow that the criticism they express is unreasonable or unjustified.” Scanlon, What We Owe To Each Other, 289. In later chapters, I will explore the idea that although blame may be appropriate in many circumstances, this will not always imply that certain overt acts of criticism will always be appropriate in those same circumstances.
formative influences, perhaps suffering negative consequences as a result, I do not accept that these circumstances render blame unfair.

I have endeavoured to take seriously the claim that blame is burdensome, as I do think that there is a sense in which this true, though the UV argument is misguided in its claims of unfairness. Additionally, I have sought to clarify that the most potentially “weighty” and characteristic burden of blame is not one that could be fully experienced by one who insufficiently appreciates the significance of certain normative considerations. I agree with others who have described the judgments involved in blame as having a certain significance that is independent of agent recognition. I have also tried to explain the fact that although I believe relational impairment and its significance to be agent-independent, I also believe that an agent’s experience of this fact of impairment as particularly weighty or burdensome is primarily dependent upon whether he or she recognizes and accepts the significance of the violated standards. The agent-dependence of this burden also helps to explain why I think that proponents of the UV argument are mistaken in thinking of the burden of blame as something that one can choose to distribute to the individual who is blamed.

In the next chapter I will explain in greater detail how to conceive of someone’s inability or difficulty in properly recognizing norms, and in particular, moral reasons. I will seek to assess the plausibility that this recognition might be influenced by various circumstances. Throughout my discussion, I will employ examples from the philosophical literature in order to ultimately assess whether, even if blame is not unfair in light of wrongdoing as the UV claims, certain expressions or responses to wrongdoing might be unfair in light of unfortunate formative influences.
Chapter 3: Influences on Recognizing Moral Reasons

“I am the infamous creature you have heard of that lives among the thieves, and that never from the first moment I can recollect my eyes and senses on London streets have known any better life, or kinder words than they have given me, so help me God! Do not mind shrinking openly from me, lady. I am younger you would think to look at me, but I am well used to it. The poorest women fall back, as I make my way along the crowded pavement. [ . . . ] Thank Heaven upon your knees, dear lady,” cried the girl, “that you had friends to care for and keep you in your childhood, and that you were never in the midst of cold and hunger, and riot and drunkenness, and-and something worse than all-as I have been from my cradle.”

(Charles Dickens, The Adventures of Oliver Twist)

I. Introduction

Now that I have explained my main project of calling into question the claims of the UV argument as they relate to blame and have clarified the terms that I will be using, I will turn my attention toward two tasks that are an important part of exposing the flaws of the UV argument. First, I will provide a basic articulation of the way that I understand the activity of “recognizing moral reasons.” This articulation is necessary for furthering the second main goal of this chapter, which is to evaluate the claim that certain influences act to hinder this recognition and that these facts are relevant to blame. My specific interest is in understanding the ways in which poor formative circumstances may act as a hindrance to recognition because of their pertinence to the claims of the UV argument. I have already explained why I believe it is mistaken to construe blame’s burden as something that is determined and distributed by he or she who


63 My focus on “moral reasons” is not supposed to imply that moral reasons are easily distinguishable from other sorts of reasons. Wherever I use “moral reasons”, I will be referring to certain values and considerations that although not clearly distinguishable from other sorts of value, will include certain sorts of considerations that give rise to imperatives and prohibitions regarding the treatment of other persons. The cases under consideration are those in which the individuals involved display certain attitudes of disrespect towards others. The attitude generally involves failing to recognize the value of persons or certain groups of persons, and thus, the way that they ought to be treated. What Joseph Raz says about “moral reasoning” resonates: “. . . so much moral reasoning seems to be nothing but ordinary reasoning about what it is reasonable and unreasonable to do.” Joseph Raz, Engaging Reason: On the Theory and Value of Action (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 302.
blames. That being said, there remains the question of whether the demands inherent in blame as well as expressions of blame are inappropriate or unfair in light of an agent’s difficulty in recognizing moral reasons. The UV argument maintains that circumstantial influences are relevant to blame, making it either wholly inappropriate or something that ought to be somehow tempered or modified in light of these influences. Although I reject the UV argument’s contention that these circumstances make blame unfair, I try to make sense of some of the argument’s claims in order to better explain how our views diverge. I explain why I think that poor formative circumstances do not make blame unfair, but may be relevant to the normative standards associated with our treatment of others and also, to our understanding of the possibility of future relations with one another. I also consider the relevance of certain states of irrationality or ignorance to blame and provide a brief outline of my thoughts concerning the moral standing of psychopaths. Before explaining the different views of how blame ought to be expressed, I also consider the idea of blame as a sort of protest that remains wholly appropriate, even if an agent fails to understand this protest. Since discussions about the recognition of moral reasons can become quite abstract, I draw upon cases from the philosophical literature in order to better understand and assess the phenomenon.

Let us begin with the excerpt from *Oliver Twist* at the top of the chapter. The passage is a dramatic portrayal of the kinds of conditions that many poor souls of the time had to endure, especially (and unfortunately) during the formative parts of their lives. Childhood in particular is a time when people require special care, both physically and intellectually. It is a common to hear, if not as an excuse, then as an explanation for wrongdoing “Well . . . he came from a bad home,” or perhaps more dramatically “. . . he was raised by wolves.” There are a variety of factors and circumstances that have the potential to influence the judgments one makes, the
attitudes one comes to hold and the ways in which one acts. Each person has a multitude of influences bearing upon her, many of which are not under her control. Such influences often include other persons; parents or teachers who shape the information that one receives, and may include the particular attitudes or values that a certain culture espouses. Although these formative influences can be either positive or negative, my focus will be on those that are negative. My assessment of the cases that I have drawn from the literature may suggest some implications for a positive account of the kinds of influences that are conducive to the recognition of moral reasons, but the cases are primarily of interest in that they make perspicuous the sorts of circumstances that hinder the recognition of these reasons. Some understanding of the way in which certain circumstances may hinder recognition need not imply that their absence is necessary or sufficient for the successful recognition of moral reasons. An indication of some relation between these circumstances and an agent’s difficulty in recognizing moral reasons does not imply that these influences invariably determine the way in which moral reasons are recognized.

II. The Matter of Recognition

Although I have already referred to the recognition of moral reasons in passing, it is important to pause and clarify my understanding of this activity of recognition. As I noted earlier, I do not necessarily view the “moral” considerations that count in favour of certain beliefs or actions as obviously distinct from other sorts of considerations. Still, there is something important about moral considerations and the recognition of moral reasons that sets them aside from other sorts of considerations and the recognition of other sorts of reasons. It will

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64 It is also true that an individual can, herself, act as an influence on her own actions and beliefs. For example, if it is the case that one is already prejudiced towards a certain group, this will likely influence one’s wider network of beliefs and attitudes, either consciously or unconsciously. It may lead one to interpret certain behaviour as antagonistic or as confirming a certain stereotype.
be helpful to demonstrate this distinction by considering a value judgment from what most would consider a non-moral domain: the art of recognizing a good cigar. Imagine that someone named Charles is inducted into the practice of cigar tasting and learns how to discriminate between the best and worst cigars, noticing the right sort of considerations that speak in favour of a good cigar. He recognizes that the presence of certain flavours and the absence of certain undesirable ones count towards the goodness of a cigar. Having understood these distinctions, Charles is able to skillfully discriminate between various cigars. Yet, despite his ability to appreciate a good cigar it is still, we might say, “open” to him to engage in cigar-related activities while ignoring these judgments. Now, imagine that Charles disregards a cigar’s goodness in favour of something seemingly arbitrary when choosing a cigar, like the colour of the box in which it is presented. We may well consider that this is odd, and it may rightly affect one’s judgment of whether Charles should be considered a cigar connoisseur. His activities may mean other connoisseurs no longer invited to cigar appreciation parties, but they will not likely have any significant implications for his relations with other persons more generally.

How does Charles’s failure to recognize value in his choice of cigars compare with a case of recognizing the value of something more clearly “moral” than cigars? Just as in Charles’ case, it may be that someone is able to explain the relation between certain features of persons, perhaps rationality, and the implications for the way that someone ought to be treated (i.e., with respect) while failing to treat others with respect. Just as Charles could be criticized for not

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65 It is unclear whether Charles should be considered irrational. Choosing a cigar based on something other than good quality may not be irrational in the narrow sense if, for example, the agent sees certain considerations as counting in favour of trying other cigars while also recognizing that these cigars are poor quality. The inconsistency would clearly arise if the agent recognized considerations as counting in favour of a quality cigar but then judged a cigar lacking those qualities as a quality cigar. The main point that I am trying to make is that if he chooses to ignore matters of quality when choosing to smoke a cigar, then although he can be questioned, others have no right to demand that he treat cigars in certain ways when smoking them, nor that he apologize or make amends when he disregards these considerations.
understanding cigars correctly or for not recognizing their value when he engages in cigar-related activities, this second individual could likewise be criticized for not treating others as they ought to be treated on account of their value. The main difference between the failure to recognize value in case of the cigar and the failure to recognize value in the case of the person lies in the significance of one’s relations with others. Charles may not be considered a cigar aficionado if he fails to choose cigars based on their value, other things being equal, for example, if he cannot afford them, but this will likely have limited implications for his relation with other persons. In contrast, his failure to treat persons in accordance with their value as ends will and indeed ought to have significant implications for his relations with others. If Charles is unable to properly respect a person’s autonomy, her interests, or the importance of her well-being, this will limit the sort of relationships that he can have with other persons. He will be unable to value others in the way that they ought to be valued. It may be that others remain unaware of Charles’ attitudes or tolerate them, but even if his disrespect is not obvious, the existence of his disrespect will still change the kind of relationship that he does, in fact, have with other persons.\(^{66}\)

I will now consider more closely this idea of failing to recognize moral reasons; that is, how someone may fail to appreciate the way in which certain considerations, such as a person’s rationality or value that count in favour of certain judgments, attitudes and actions.\(^{67}\) As I

\(^{66}\) For example, imagine that Charles is skilled at manipulating others and persuading them to do what he wants them to do, disrespecting the interests of the person in question. It may be that his victim remains unaware of this fact, but it is still the case that Charles’ relationships lack the sort of genuine respect that is a hallmark of genuine friendship. Joseph Raz also speaks of the special stringency of duties of respect as they relate to people, as opposed to something like a work of art. It is true that the two may be interrelated as when, for example, the person is an artist, but he notes that unlike inanimate objects and many other creatures, persons importantly have a sense of their own identity and care about when it is being acknowledged and affirmed by others. Raz, *Value, Respect and Attachment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 170.

\(^{67}\) It is important to note that I am not necessarily arguing that the recognition of how certain considerations count in favour of certain sorts of judgments, attitudes and actions need to be a process where someone sits down and to ponder the value of rationality and how its values have various implications for one’s judgments and actions. This may happen, on occasion, but I imagine that for most of us, at least initially, proper recognition does not necessarily
understand it, this misrecognition may occur along with a variety of different mental states that
the agent may or may not have about her own judgment. For example, this misrecognition may
occur when someone does not treat another with proper respect, but also recognizes that she is
acting against her best judgment. She may disregard this judgment and make decisions on the
basis of some other consideration such as convenience, rather than on the basis of the value of
persons. She may think that it is easier to get her way by deceiving someone and in so doing,
fails to respect her rationality. The misrecognition of moral reasons may also occur in cases
where someone fails to recognize her attitudes or actions as concerning or problematic. My focus
in what follows will be on considering the negative influence that poor formative circumstances
may have on the recognition of moral reasons, although I will also touch upon the influence that
other factors such as one’s own irrational beliefs, may have on recognition. Understanding the
way in which these factors might influence recognition will help to clarify whether these
influences ought to make some difference to blame, even if they do not render blame unfair.

III. Negative Influences on the Recognition of Moral Considerations

i) Poor Formative Circumstances

It is daunting, and perhaps even mistaken to try to reason in the abstract, about the
conditions involved in an individual’s recognition of moral reasons and conversely, the
conditions that hinder recognition. One may imagine that this project is best left to the domain of

require this sort of process, but rather, is often unconscious and not fully articulated. There are reasonable
discussions to be had about whether someone’s ability to articulate the way in which certain considerations are
connected to his or her judgments and actions distinguishes this more unconscious recognition from conscious
recognition in a way that one ought to care about in one’s assessment of others. These questions may also arise in
the non-moral realm when, for example, a cigar rookie is able to make complex distinctions between cigars without
having had the benefit of experiencing different sorts of cigars in practice or without being able to fully articulate his
discriminations.
the social sciences because of its focus on empirical data and the possibility that it may be able to show that certain conditions are positively related to the appreciation of certain values and to successful participation in relationships. I do not doubt that the social sciences may be able to provide some insight into the kinds of conditions influencing the appreciation of moral reasons. If, for example, something like fear can be shown to influence the sorts of beliefs that one acquires as a child, then this may help to explain why it is harder for some children to acquire new beliefs or to recognize certain values, even later in life.

Because I am not writing as a student of the social sciences, my approach to understanding and assessing the recognition of moral reasons will be different. My assessment involves considering various cases from the philosophical literature that make reference to the negative influence of formative circumstances. For example, one of the cases that I will consider is Susan Wolf’s thought experiment involving JoJo, the deprived and isolated child of an evil island dictator. Though a case such as JoJo’s where someone’s experience is so thoroughly and negatively influenced by circumstance may never have existed, the case is still useful as an extreme example that can be applied to more run of the mill cases. A similar, more commonplace version of the same situation occurs when someone’s access to information or experiences is

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68 This association of the appreciation with certain considerations or moral values with successful participation in interpersonal relationships is not meant to imply that appreciation of certain basic moral values is sufficient for being a good friend, sister, partner etc. For example, one may recognize certain moral reasons in both acts and judgments, but still fail to be very generous or creative in showing one’s love or care to others. Still, I think that this appreciation ought to be seen as necessary for a good relationship insofar as a good relationship is constituted not just by the way in which one acts, but also, one’s unspoken judgments and attitudes.

69 Note that these sorts of observations about the possible role of circumstance in recognizing moral reasons are not supposed to imply that the circumstances can tell us anything about the content of morality itself, though they may have some bearing on how one assesses a person or responds to wrongdoing. Importantly, empirical observations alone are also insufficient to explain why such facts may or may not have relevance to these sorts of responses. For a similar discussion about the irrelevance of neuroscience to the justification of certain moral theories, see Selim Berker, “The Normative Insignificance of Neuroscience,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 37, no. 4 (2004): 293–329.
negatively influenced and limited by something like prejudiced parents or a morally misguided society.

Despite my contention that poor formative circumstances like these do not make blame unfair, I would not want to deny the fact that various circumstances may negatively influence an individual and the person she becomes. To be sure, a person who has been systematically abused and disregarded by society may have a more difficult time appreciating others’ interests, the role that they ought to play in treating them, and the attitudes they should have towards them. For example, a child who may have natural inclinations to treat other persons and creatures with sympathy may, after systematic abuse, consciously or unconsciously call into question his original attitudes, or she may come to be persuaded that there is no reason to respect others; perhaps that the rule that ought to govern interpersonal relationships is something like “might is right.”

Many of us likely have the intuition that such formative conditions ought to make some difference in our understanding of and treatment of other persons. If a vulnerable and impressionable child is continually taught to disregard the needs of others, then it will not be surprising if she cannot see the needs of others as anything but insignificant. Young people are particularly vulnerable to the influences of those who have authority over not only their actions, but also over their attitudinal development. This is because they are often less able to critically evaluate the messages that are conveyed to them, and because they are confronted by a limited

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70 Barbara Harris, the sister of convicted murderer Robert Harris, describes her brother as once sympathetic to the needs of other beings, but having been abused too long for the sympathy to be maintained. Gary Watson, “Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme,” in Agency and Answerability (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 241.
number of formative influences.\textsuperscript{71} Despite the vulnerability of children to these influences, history has also shown, time and time again, that political leaders and other authority figures are also often successful in influencing the attitudes and actions of great numbers of adults with disturbing effectiveness.\textsuperscript{72} In my opinion, it is plausible to think that there are similarities in the way in which a child of a certain age weighs and appreciates various epistemic considerations, and the way in which a poorly reasoning adult weighs these same considerations. That being so, I think that it is reasonable to claim that most adults will have better rational “tools” with which to critically evaluate their experience. It is important to make sense of these influences that seem to drive the claim that blame under certain conditions is unfair, while also distinguishing these observations from the normative question of what difference these circumstances\textit{ ought} to make to blame or to expressions of blame.

The four cases that I will consider in this chapter have been used as examples of instances where poor formative circumstances have negatively influenced how someone responds to moral reasons. In all cases, the individual under consideration is someone who does not fully recognize the fact that all persons, regardless of any contingent characteristic such as race, religion or sex, have reason to be recognized and valued as ends in themselves.\textsuperscript{73} This respect, if properly realized, would be manifest in the agent’s holding certain attitudes and engaging in certain

\textsuperscript{71} It is unclear to me exactly how these developmental changes, their stages, and the like actually work, but it is important to remember that learning in children is often gradual due to developmental changes. Thus, it seems reasonable to suggest that the influence of poor formative circumstances on a child will likely vary along developmental stages, even if it is unclear where exactly he or she may reside on a developmental spectrum. For example, see R. Jay Wallace, \textit{Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments}, 232–33.

\textsuperscript{72} There are too many examples to cite, but the deadly Rwandan Genocide of 1994 and the atrocities carried out by the Nazis in the Second World War are but two of many cases.

\textsuperscript{73} Raz discusses the case of the so-called “amoralist” who thinks that his “friends” have value only if they have certain characteristics that he values such as beauty or wit. He may claim that these characteristics endow people with value in and of themselves, but denies that all people are of value in and of themselves. Raz, \textit{Engaging Reason}, 299.
actions of aid or preservation as well as refraining from certain harmful actions, as appropriate.\footnote{Raz, \textit{Respect, Value and Attachment}, 161–64. I agree with Raz when he claims that although not everyone has a reason to engage with every sort of value nor have an obligation to bring valuable things into existence, all individuals have reason to respect things of value.}

I will consider four different cases from the philosophical literature: case A, Susan Wolf’s example of JoJo, the sequestered son of an evil, sadistic dictator; case B, Robert Adams’ case of the German officer who is an alumnus of Hitler Youth; case C, Nomy Arpaly’s treatment of the case of the fictional character Huckleberry Finn, raised in the confines of a racist society; and case D, Angela Smith’s example of Abigail and Bert, two racists who were raised in racist and tolerant homes, respectively. It is worth pointing out that only in the first, second, and last cases do we have the benefit of learning how these children who were raised in poor formative circumstances have come to reason as adults.\footnote{For full details on these four cases, see Robert Adams, “Involuntary Sins,” \textit{The Philosophical Review} 94, no. 1 (1985): 17–24.; Nomy Arpaly, \textit{Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Moral Agency} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 75–78. Angela Smith, “Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life,” \textit{Ethics} 115, no. 2 (2005), 267–71.; Susan Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility,” in \textit{Free Will}, ed. Gary Watson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 379–85.} I have two main aims in considering these cases. My primary aim is to reflect on what such cases can do, if anything, to help clarify the claim that certain influences affect the recognition of moral reasons while also evaluating the plausibility of these claims.\footnote{Note that this does not imply that I will be providing a positive account of what is required in order to recognize moral reasons, although recognizing hindrances may help to inform this project, should it be undertaken.} My secondary aim is to use the cases to further consider whether negative formative influences ought to have any influence on blame or on one’s response to the wrongdoer.

Consider case A, the plight of JoJo that Wolf considers in her paper “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility.” JoJo is born on an isolated island and develops under the all-pervasive influence of his father, a malevolent dictator. He comes to value what his father values, which unfortunately, happens to be the opposite of what morality requires. As an adult, he
wholeheartedly “sends people to prison and tortures them on a whim.”77 Wolf sets up the example such a way that JoJo is not akratic, but rather, wholeheartedly endorses his evil desires and actions.78 She argues that because of his unfortunate experiences, JoJo lacks “sanity,” defined in this case as the ability to revise his views in accordance with a correct view of the world. This reality is one that includes a proper appreciation of morality: of what is required and what is impermissible, amongst other things. Wolf contends that if sanity is diminished, then one cannot be morally responsible, or at least not fully responsible for how one acts.

What is this case meant to show about the recognition of moral reasons and what can it illuminate if we consider it more reflectively? Wolf states explicitly, “It is unclear whether anyone with a childhood such as his could have developed into anything but the twisted and perverse sort of person that he has become.”79 However, she does not provide a full explanation of why this should be the case. The claim seems to be that if one is only exposed to mistaken values throughout one’s life, then one’s experience makes it such that there will be little or no way of questioning the values that one comes to acquire. This acquired set of values and ways of thinking is what one will subsequently use to interpret other perspectives and experiences. Wolf’s example is one that can benefit from further unpacking in order to better assess it in terms of my two main aims, as noted earlier.

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77 Wolf explains the implications of her view in light of the negative influences of social circumstance: “Sanity, remember, involves the ability to know the difference between right and wrong, and a person who, even on reflection, cannot see the that having someone tortured because he failed to salute you is wrong plainly lacks the requisite ability. Less obviously, but quite analogously, this new proposal explains why we give less than full responsibility to persons who, though acting badly, act in ways that are strongly encouraged by their societies – the slaveowners of the 1850s, the Nazis of the 1930s, and many male chauvinists of our fathers’ generation, for example . . . Like JoJo, they are, at the deepest level, unable cognitively and normatively to recognize and appreciate the world for what it is.” Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility,” 382–83.

78 Ibid., 379.

79 Ibid., 380.
While it is clear that JoJo is in a terribly unfortunate situation, but it is not entirely clear why he would be rendered unable to question his acquired beliefs, even if it may be more difficult for him than for others. Assumedly when JoJo is an adult he still possesses the capacity to reason despite the fact that his reasoning may not always be good reasoning. The values that JoJo has been exposed to are those implying that it is permissible to harm others when they fail to obey his whims and commands. As described, the case focuses on the way in which JoJo thinks about the treatment of the subjects within his dictatorial domain. There is no mention or discussion of the treatment that he receives at the hand of others or of his own father, the original dictator. It may be the case that both JoJo and stranger alike are subject to a similar form of retributive authoritarianism. For example, it may be that if JoJo does not salute his own father, he also suffers punishment. Alternatively, it may be that he is raised in a Godfather-like scenario where those within the family are treated favourably, unlike non-intimates.

If this latter scenario is a more accurate description, then it would seem as though JoJo’s influences are not necessarily as restricted as they may have originally seemed. Although he may be habituated to think that it is reasonable to act brutally towards others, he may also be someone who experiences respect, regard, and, perhaps, even care. If this is so, then it is plausible that JoJo would start to wonder why he is being treated differently from others and come to understand that he does not wish to be treated in the same manner as these them. He may reflect on the fact of similarity between himself and his subjects and come to realize that the others that he abuses are not so different from him in terms of their basic interests. In my estimation, it is plausible to think that although JoJo benefits from his privileged position, he may still question his preferential treatment. Although he may lack a worked out sense of justice, he may, at least, have some idea that this inequality and disrespect is somehow mistaken or wrong. It may not be
something that occurs to him immediately, but rather, something that is realized through a
process of gradual awareness supported by exposure to new experiences, as he reflects on their
significance, over time.\textsuperscript{80}

If JoJo is unlucky and lives in a situation where he is abused just as he abuses others, then
he lacks the benefit of experiencing respect from others. As explained above, this experience of
respect may be reasonably thought to encourage reasoning and questioning concerning the basis
for one’s own preferential treatment.\textsuperscript{81} Although it may be easier to understand JoJo questioning
the justice of such treatment in cases where he has experienced respect, it also seems possible
that he may question the justice of this sort of treatment while suffering as a fellow victim of
abuse. In fact, experiencing the pain of abuse may arguably make him more prone to this line of
questioning. Even if one is abused rather than respected while being commanded to abuse others,
one can imagine the plausibility of JoJo’s coming to realize that he actually does have reason to
attend to the interests and well-being of others. Although the example of JoJo may have limited
use because of the extreme nature of its influences and restrictions, I am still sympathetic to the
spirit of its concern. I am certainly sympathetic to the idea that being subject to such restrictive,
abusive influences may negatively influence one’s ability reflect upon and recognize the
wrongness of one’s attitudes and actions, although I also hope to have cast some doubt on the

\textsuperscript{80} Rightly recognizing that changes in one’s beliefs and attitudes may occur slowly, over time, Nomy Arpaly refers
to such changes as dawns. Arpaly defines the term as follows: “dawning—cases in which people change their
minds, sans deliberation, as a result of a long period of exposure to new evidence.” Arpaly, \textit{Unprincipled Virtue}, 54.

\textsuperscript{81} Although it may seem that I am doing armchair psychology, I hope that is not what I am doing, or not merely. I
am not trying to use empirical methods to prove a point about moral perception and moral reasoning. Rather, my
main aim is to defeat the underlying claim that questioning one’s experience would be impossible in conditions of
hardship through a simple analysis of other factors that may make this line of questioning plausible, even if it
remains difficult.
claim that JoJo’s abhorrent attitudes should be understood as the only attitudes that he could have plausibly acquired, even under such extreme circumstances.\textsuperscript{82}

Case B, Adams’ example, revolves around a former member of the Hitler Youth movement. The now adult officer is described as someone who, during the formative stages of his life, acquired racist and hateful attitudes towards those belonging to other groups. Adams borrows the example from Alan Donagan whose view of blame he challenges. Donagan argues that the officer raised in the Hitler Youth might not be culpable for actions that result from ignorance. He seems to think that the officer’s false beliefs about the respect due to others arise from the restricting influences of his youth. If this officer has been negatively influenced into a state of ignorance then according to Donagan, there are seemingly few if any ways for the officer to question his acquired beliefs and, thus, Donagan maintains that this ought to have implications for the officer’s moral responsibility.\textsuperscript{83}

Adams reconstructs Donagan’s argument, including his other claim that a West Point officer who has been taught about ethical truths should be considered culpable if he fails to understand his “duty to non-combatants as human beings.” On account of Donagan’s voluntarist view of moral responsibility, the Hitler Youth alumnus is not likely to be considered culpable.

\textsuperscript{82} Nomy Arpaly describes an example where Solomon is raised to believe that women are bad reasoners and because the seclusion of his town, is not exposed to any counter-examples. Arpaly calls Solomon “more ignorant than morally vicious,” but also notes that were he to maintain this belief in light of ample counter-examples, then he ought to be described as being prejudiced. Arpaly, \textit{Unprincipled Virtue}, 104. In this case, I would claim that Solomon could still be appropriately blamed, even if he should be treated differently from someone who maintains his view in light of counter-examples. What matters for blame on the Scanlonian account that I have been employing is that one is a reasoning being, in Strawsonian terms, someone with whom to reason, even if in futility, rather than someone with whom to manage and control.

\textsuperscript{83} It is interesting to me that there often seems to be this tendency to view acquired beliefs, especially of the heinous sort, as nearly unquestionable. I have no doubt that this is often the experience of children, but it seems quite commonplace for children who have been raised in a culture or household with certain views – religious, political or otherwise, to question and often reject those views. Still, that is a matter of speculation. Whether or not certain barriers pose difficulty for the recognition of moral reasons is a matter of interest in regards to how one ought to respond to wrongdoers, but I do not consider it to be of particular relevance in determining responsibility, blameworthiness or even blame (as opposed to expressions of blame).
blameworthy. His ignorance is only culpable if negligent and negligent only if there is something that he could have done or some choice he could have made to prevent his moral ignorance. Donagan refers to culpable negligence as negligence arising out of “want of due care.” For his part, Adams is skeptical of Donagan’s conclusion regarding the officer’s blameworthiness. Although Adams does refer to the officer as a kind of “victim of education,” he is also unconvinced that there is some special process in which one needs to engage in order to be able to acquire sound moral views.⁸⁴ For example, is it the case that all persons need to have completed an ethics course in order to be considered morally responsible? Is a course sufficient? It seems not, says Adams, insofar as one could become educated in the history of various moral theories and knowledgeable about their content without truly recognizing the value of other persons; strange, but possible. Contrary to Donagan, Adams maintains that the officer is still morally responsible for his attitudes and actions; they are attributable to him in a morally relevant sense, and they are something for which he can be blamed.⁸⁵ Adams argues that although the officer is not exempt from moral responsibility, since he is a victim of sorts, the officer may have a claim to be regarded and treated with mercy.⁸⁶

Although neither Adams nor Donagan use the phrase “recognize moral reason,” Donagan is cited as referring to an officer’s understanding of his “duty to non-combatants as human beings.” I will interpret the recognition of this duty as the recognition of a sort of moral reason in the sense I have been describing. In other words, if an officer recognizes moral reasons, it is not

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⁸⁴ Adam casts doubt upon the standard of “due care” as a pre-requisite for culpability and blame: “Consider, at the other extreme, the professional moralist who has spent a lifetime of painstaking work refining and testing principles, but who without conscious hypocrisy has developed an utterly bizarre system of ethics that suits his own misanthropy and taste for eccentricity. Is he inculpable for the inhumanity of his opinions if he holds them sincerely and aspires to live by them? Surely not. Yet we can hardly say that his errors proceed from ‘want of due consideration.’” Adams, “Involuntary Sins,” 19–20.


⁸⁶ Ibid., 19–22.
just that the officer recognizes the existence of a rule that one should follow because it is part of some political agreement or rule of conduct. Rather, it is that he recognizes the moral significance of this duty. I believe that there are two ways that one could interpret the ability of the Hitler Youth alumnus, or lack thereof, to recognize moral reasons. One possibility is that he possesses the necessary means to successfully recognize basic moral truths, independent of any experience that he may or may not have had. On this view, he would be considered worthy of blame, because there are some truths that can be discovered by reasoning, and for which ignorance provides no excuse. This claim gains force as one’s rational faculties are developed in adulthood and one acquires the benefit of diverse experiences, although I am not sure whether this latter criterion would be necessary in Adams’ view. The other interpretation of this situation is that it may be difficult for the officer to recognize the significance of moral reasons because of certain experiences despite his rational capacities. It is this latter view that Adams seems to favour in his interpretation.

Although Adams maintains that the officer can and should be blamed for his attitudes, he does want to leave room for recognizing the fact that the officer’s experiences have been detrimental to him, noting that he is a “victim” of sorts. It is not clear if being an unfortunate victim alone would be grounds to be treated with mercy, in light of wrongdoing, unless being a victim also had implications for whether one successfully recognizes moral value. If one could be described as a victim of poor formative circumstances but this had no effect on one’s attitudes or actions, then it would be unclear what connection this piece of history would have in being treated with, or without, mercy. Adams’ view seems to be that one’s difficulty in recognizing moral truths is such that certain treatment, such as reproach or punishment, may be inappropriate even if blame remains appropriate. Although this may all seem perfectly fine in light of an
attributive view of moral responsibility, I find it interesting that Adams regards such an agent as having a claim to be “treated with mercy,” particularly since reproach seems to serve as something of a protest against ill treatment, not to mention a possible signal to the wrongdoer that he has done wrong. The thwarting of these acts ought not to be accepted without considerable consideration. I will set aside this case for the time being and I will now turn to case C, Arpaly’s presentation of the case of Huck Finn, a fictional child who hides a slave from slave catchers, even though he is internally conflicted about his actions.

Arpaly portrays Huck as being negatively influenced by the racist society in which he is raised. She describes him, like most children, as someone who is “not very good at abstract deliberation, and it never occurs to him to doubt what his society considers common sense.” When given the opportunity to hide or give up Jim, an escaped slave, Huck does indeed conceal him from the slave catchers. Still, he considers himself to be weak-willed as a result. Arpaly interprets this as Huck unconsciously recognizing that Jim is, in fact, his equal and that he ought to treat him accordingly, despite his contrary, conscious beliefs. She diagnoses the situation as one in which Huck acts for moral reasons, even though he could not be said to consciously endorse those same reasons. On this interpretation, Huck could be said to be recognizing moral reasons through the judgments that guide his actions, even though he does, at the same time consciously disavow these judgments.

What is one to make of this construal of Huck Finn and what might it say about what it means to recognize moral reasons? As noted earlier in the case of JoJo, I believe that even though children are often confronted by amoral influences, this does not entail that they will be

87 Arpaly, Unprincipled Virtue, 75.
88 Ibid., 77.
wholly unable to question these influences, even if only unconsciously. I imagine that most children understand that an abusive parent is doing something that he ought not to do, not just that it is something that the child happens not to like. There are undoubtedly children who question the commands and teachings of authorities for good reasons, even though they lack full rational and deliberative capacities. Although most children will be able to question authority at some developmental stage, I assume, as already mentioned, that it is uncontroversial to claim that a child’s capacity for judgment should be understood differently from that of most adults. The fact that children do not yet possess fully developed rational capacities, and that their lives are often governed by limited, authoritative influences, makes it no doubt difficult for many children to question their own attitudes and actions. That being said, I would not want to claim that this is impossible, given all the anecdotal evidence of children questioning their parents or acting differently from the way in which they were taught. But, let us return to the example at hand. Since on Arpaly’s interpretation Huck is able to recognize Jim’s moral standing as a fellow human being while suffering the effects of a racist society, she considers this recognition as something praiseworthy. Of such individuals, she writes: “They are praiseworthy because, despite any character–building imposed on them by their misguided selves or others, some of their moral common sense, much of their moral goodness – that is, their responsiveness to moral reasons – remains intact.”

If Huck is considered praiseworthy for his attitudes given the difficult circumstances he has endured, this would seem to suggest that Arpaly would not think that he is worthy of blame had he turned Jim in. It is not usually the case that one is blamed for failing to act in ways that are considered praiseworthy. It is difficult to make sense of such a case, in part because Huck is not

89 Ibid., 79.
an adult. But, I do understand how these societal influences may make it more difficult for Huck to know how he should treat people regardless of race. Still, were he an adult I would contend that his conscious, discriminatory attitudes would clearly make him worthy of blame, despite any conflicting “moral” unconscious attitudes to the contrary.

Because the matter of how to evaluate the developmental capacities of children complicates this prior example, I will now turn to case D, my final example from prevailing literature. In her presentation, Smith focuses on Abigail and Bert, two adults who are similar in that they both possess vicious, racist attitudes. The difference between them lies in the formative influences of their childhood. Abigail was raised in an intolerant home where she was continually confronted by these vicious views. In contrast, Bert was raised in a tolerant home where he was exposed to positive moral values. As an adult, Abigail retains these vicious views, whereas Bert rejects the tolerant views with which he was raised and comes to adopt the same racist attitudes as Abigail.90

It is worth considering how to make sense of the relevance of the past to recognizing moral reasons in this case. It is clear that it is meant to show, as in the other cases, that the influences that one is exposed to, especially at an early stage, often affect one’s recognition of moral reasons later in life. In addition, it is likely meant to show that these influences should not be seen to determine how one will reason as an adult since one can often develop different views, than those promoted by various authorities or institutions.91 Although Bert’s case may not be uncommon, it still remains puzzling how he went wrong, given the fact that he was raised in a context that would have encouraged, and certainly not hindered, the recognition of these values.

Smith, like Scanlon, does not believe that these circumstances ought to influence responsibility for one’s attitudes, the fact that one is blameworthy, or that certain demands can be made of individuals in virtue of the attitudes they possess. She does not think that the difficulty that Abigail may have in recognizing or modifying mistaken judgments influences moral responsibility in the sense of attribution or the appropriateness of asking for justifications or explanations. Despite this attributive view of responsibility, Smith does claim that one should be “sensitive to such facts when it comes to moral criticism and assessment,” and that others should not be “too self-righteous” when considering Abigail’s situation. Smith’s statements could be interpreted to suggest that blame ought to be altered in light of past circumstances, but this would seem to be at odds with her own view of blame, one that emphasizes the significance of evaluative judgments, regardless of their origin. Assumedly, the relational impairment caused by racist attitudes is no different in the case of Abigail or Bert given that they hold the exact same attitudes, despite differing background conditions. I am left to conclude that Smith must mean that perhaps Abigail and Bert ought to be treated differently because one suffered from poor formative circumstances whereas the other did not.

I have sought to employ these four cases from the prevailing philosophical literature in order to discuss the plausibility and force of the claim that poor formative circumstances negatively influence the recognition of moral reasons. Although many accept that circumstances do not strictly determine the outcome of one’s attitudes, the examples highlighted are typically meant to show that particular circumstances should be understood as having a significantly negative effect. By studying these cases more closely, I have tried to show that even in situations involving supposedly bleak circumstances, it is not implausible to think that successful

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recognition could still likely occur, or it is at least more likely than is implied. Despite these observations regarding how circumstances may affect the recognition of moral reasons, I contend that it remains true that our status as rational beings who make evaluative judgments is what is significant in judging whether human relationships are impaired, and thus, what matters to blame. Although value may not be properly recognized, blame is appropriate because of the significance that the judgments of others have for our relations with them and because of the appropriateness of asking rational beings to defend their judgments if we suspect them to be faulty, despite how they came about. This view of moral responsibility and the appropriateness of blame contrasts with that of Wolf and perhaps Arpaly, if she does indeed think that blameworthiness can be mitigated by poor formative circumstances. This is suggested by her judgment of Huck as praiseworthy when the recognition that he should not give up Jim to the slave catchers when this is what morality required all along. Both Adams and Smith hold views that are most similar to my own, in that they see responsibility as based on the evaluative judgments that can be attributed to a rational agent and maintain that poor formative circumstances do not exempt one from blame, but leave room for the possibility that these circumstances ought to have some role in how one critically responds to others.

In order to more fully elaborate upon this proposal, I will consider two other sorts of situations which may make it more difficult for individuals to recognize moral reasons. The first is one in which someone’s irrational views perpetuate the acquisition and retention of other irrational ways of viewing the world. The second is a brief consideration of the influence of mental disorders on attitudes and actions, as well as the problem of the psychopath: who he is and whether his case is similar to that of he who fails to recognize moral reasons due to poor formative circumstances. My intention is to eventually use these cases, as well as those
aforementioned, to help make assessments about whether individuals in these situations ought to be treated differently even if blame, contrary to the UV argument, is not unfair.

ii) Motivated Irrationality, Disorders and Psychopathy

At this point, it is worth addressing the complexities of other states of affairs associated with a failure to recognize moral reasons. Although poor formative circumstances may influence how one interprets other experiences later on in life, it is also true that the retention of blameworthy attitudes into adulthood may also indicate other things about the agent. For example, it may indicate that an agent is particularly motivated to retain his or her beliefs in light of counter-evidence and to continue to interpreting experiences in the way that best helps him to retain his entrenched views. In other words, if poor formative circumstances sometimes create a sort of “film” that distorts how one sees or perceives the world, and if the development of rational faculties typically washes away that film, as it usually does, then it will take some psychological activity, even if unconscious, to replace it. The way in which one views the world can change, even if one initially holds views that clearly deny a moral value such as the equal value of persons. If those views continue to persist despite the development of an agent’s rational capacities and despite his being exposed to a greater diversity of experiences, then there is likely another explanation for why he is not changing his view, even if he remains unaware of this process. For example, it will positively serve the livelihood of a slave owner to hold certain views about the worth of persons of a certain race, just as it may help make someone’s worldview more coherent if she continues to believe that certain people are unworthy of respect. In accordance with the Scanlonian view that I am espousing, these facts do not change the appropriateness of blame.
It may be objected that those individuals who fail to alter their beliefs in light of counterevidence are exactly those we should pity, and those we should not blame, if there is no way to remove the “film” from the metaphorical “glasses” that allow them to recognize moral reasons. Despite my disagreement, I will also note that I have a hard time believing that this perceptual film is impossible to remove. If these cases do indeed exist, they would seem to require that some beliefs be so entrenched that it is impossible to question them or to come to revise them.\(^\text{93}\) I would not want to claim that all beliefs are easily revised, but I do believe that most are revisable, so long as someone is a rational being. To be sure, they may not be changed immediately, or even quickly, in spite of counter-evidence and it may take a great deal of time. If someone fails to change his beliefs in light of counter-evidence, then one has to believe that his reasons, conscious or not, for maintaining these false beliefs play a greater role in his reasoning than his interest in revising his beliefs in accordance with this evidence. Such persons suffer from what Arpaly calls “motivated irrationality,” a state of affairs in which someone is more irrational in maintaining his or her false beliefs than ignorant in having acquired them.\(^\text{94}\) Nomy Arpaly addresses this distinction when she considers the case of Solomon, a boy who lives in a secluded rural area and grows up believing that women are not nearly as competent as men when it comes to abstract thinking. He has encountered no counter-evidence to discount his view. All the women that he encounters are bad at abstract reasoning, likely because they have

\(^{93}\) Adams addresses this issue as well and contends that it is important that those who are considered morally responsible have a rich enough set of data to permit the recognition of moral values. He admits that this is a tricky matter to unpack, but seems to favour the sort of view that I favour insofar as he describes the Hitler Youth alumnus as blameworthy as long as he understands that his actions are attitudes directed towards other human beings. He writes: “... I would not say in general that exposure to enlightened ethical views is among the data required [for responsibility]. I take it the imaginary Hitler Jugend alumnus discussed above (in section VI) has rich enough data in his evidence of the humanity of the noncombatants in question, even if he is never told that they have rights. This will normally be true even if he has never met a member of the race or ethnic group to which the noncombatants belong; it is enough to know that they are human beings” Adams, “Involuntary Sins,” 27.

\(^{94}\) Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 103–04.
been excluded from activities that would develop these skills. Arpaly questions whether Solomon should be considered to be more ignorant than irrational.

Thus far I have maintained that I do not believe that the influence of poor formative circumstances on attitudes is as detrimental as is sometimes portrayed by proponents of the UV argument and does not render blame unfair. I have also explained that I understand blame to take as its object the evaluations and attitudes of other persons. The attitudes of persons have relevance to other rational agents when they are indicative of how someone recognizes values, or fails to value other persons. As I earlier noted, the significance of these attitudes in our relations with others depends on the fact that certain rational demands can be made of other persons as fellow rational beings. Take, for example, this case of Secluded Solomon.\(^95\) One way of interpreting this case is to conclude that if Solomon’s experiences are truly so restrictive that there is no way of knowing that women can also engage in intellectual activities, then perhaps his failure to treat women as intellectual equals ought not to be interpreted as indicative of a failure of respect. It seems as though his attitudes should perhaps also not be seen as constituting an impairment of relations in the sense that is relevant to blame in a Scanlonian sense.\(^96\) This interpretation of the example is dependent upon the extent to which one is persuaded that such restrictive experiences actually occur and, as has been alluded to in the examples above, that there are situations in which rational agents have little way of questioning their experiences and acquired beliefs.

\(^95\) Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 103–04.

\(^96\) Kyla Ebbels-Duggan also favours an attributive or state-based account of responsibility but persuasively argues for a view that I also favor. That is, although poor formative circumstances alone do not change responsibility or blameworthiness, they may help to make clear whether the attitudes that someone possesses are actually objectionable. Kyla Ebbels-Duggan, “Dealing with the Past,” *Philosophical Studies* 164, no. 1 (2013): 159–60.
According to my interpretation, if Solomon is unaware that women are not inherently intellectually inferior to men and if there is little way for him to question this claim, given his experiences, then his failure to include women in intellectual discussions and activities should not be understood so much as a failure of respect as much as a case of unfortunate but understandable ignorance. Still, it is appropriate and reasonable to demand that he treat all persons as equally capable, despite his ignorance, but it may not be appropriate to blame him or chastise him to any great extent. As I remarked earlier, this is not because poor formative circumstances make prejudicial attitudes acceptable, but rather, because this contextual information seems to change the content of the attitudes themselves. This is because his evaluative judgment will not necessarily reflect a failure to appreciate the moral status of women, but instead, a failure to recognize important information about women. Admittedly, this line is not always clear. If, alternatively, Solomon grew up thinking that women should be treated with disdain or even harmed, then it would seem appropriate to blame him for failing to recognize something basic about how other persons, or even just fellow sentient beings, ought to be treated. If Solomon were truly ignorant of women’s intellectual abilities and had no evidence to the contrary, then his failure to include women in intellectual discussions would not reflect a failure to respect them in the same way that a desire to cause harm or to demean them surely would. It seems to me that his views about women do not necessarily indicate a judgment about the value of women, but rather, ignorance of an empirical fact, a fact about the kinds of skills they possess. Some may contend that the distinction between these two sorts of judgments is not as clean as one might think, but although this may be the case, I think the example is useful in demonstrating how certain restrictive experiences can sometime influence knowledge in a way that need not immediately imply a failure to recognize moral considerations.
What might the ignorance involved in a case such as Solomon’s imply about the attitudes that arise from certain disorders, the most extreme of these being psychopathy? I want to recognize first and foremost that I am fairly ignorant of the intricacies of various mental disorders and how they might ultimately influence or limit one’s reasoning. I also have no doubt that various maladies may influence the way that one weighs reasons. Imagine an example involving anxiety: If Anxious Annie is supposed to meet a friend, Fred, but has an anxiety disorder, she may be overcome with fear at the thought of driving to the coffee shop. If she texts Fred and explains the situation, it is unclear that she has done something that should be understood as impairing the relationship. It is true that it may be more difficult to make plans with Annie in the future, but it does not seem as though her attitude should be considered as impairing as, say the same way as the attitude of someone who breaks plans just because she can’t be bothered to get in her car. To be sure, it may be difficult to be Annie’s friend because of some of her limitations, but her attitudes are not obviously impairing.

The example of anxious Annie involves someone who does not have trouble recognizing moral reasons, but rather, has trouble acting upon them. It may be helpful to consider the case of another person, Anita, who suffers from a disorder that makes it difficult for her to appreciate or take seriously the claims and rights of others to be treated in certain ways. Normally, such attitudes would impair a friendship. Should the fact Anita has a physiological brain “disorder” make any difference to blame? It seems not, if blame is understood on this Scanlonian model, but I have to admit that this is a hard case. It is not that I think that someone needs to understand the force of moral reasons in order to be open to moral criticism, but if there was no way that someone could ever be expected to understand the resentment that another may feel at her behaviour or a demand for justification, then this does seem to change something about the
nature of blame or at least the appropriate response to the wrongdoing. I am not sure how many cases of this sort there are where someone is truly unable to make sense of a demand for an apology or justification or remains ever unable to give one, in principle, but if so, it seems as though psychopaths might best fit this description.

If it is true that psychopaths do not have any capacity whatsoever for recognizing that other human beings are worthy of respect, then although his judgments make the alteration of attitudes and intentions appropriate, it is also questionable whether any sort of expressed reproach or demand for justification would be appropriate. It is not just that the psychopath’s attitudes are so ingrained that he would not understand this demand for an apology, but rather, that it would be, in principle, impossible for him to respond appropriately or to come to any understanding about his wrongdoing. Although I assume that he is, in other senses, a rational being capable of making judgments and weighing reasons, this does not imply that he understands the force of moral norms. As Gary Watson has noted, he may understand moral demands as something more akin to “a threat or communication of preference,” and it may make little sense, from a normative standpoint, to think that demands can be appropriately addressed to someone who, in principle, will find them unintelligible.  

When it comes to understanding the appropriateness of blaming psychopaths, an important question to ask is: Do we stand in a moral relationship with psychopaths? The moral relationship is, on Scanlon’s account, the relation in which we stand to others in virtue of being fellow rational beings and one that requires and prohibits certain actions. Psychopaths may make evaluations that have some significance and implications for how we respond to them, but not in

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the same sense as if they were fellow rational beings of whom it would be appropriate to make demands. On the face of it, they are the sorts of rational beings who can never, in principle, properly conform to moral norms and, although different from non-human animals, the significance of a psychopath’s evaluations will be different than that of non-psychopathic humans. To use a poor analogy regarding the recognition of artistic value, there will be some difference in the significance of the attitudes of non-rational beings, for example, an animal who doesn’t appreciate art, the person who is has the potential to recognize the subtleties of good art in principle but does not in practice and the person who has none of the mental capacity to recognize the distinctions needed to appreciate good art, though he or she may perhaps recognize good food or good cigars. Any demand that those in the first or last categories justify their bad tastes is seemingly inappropriate.

IV. The Relevance of Limitations on Recognizing Moral Reasons to Blame

Thus far, I have attempted to use the aforementioned examples to elucidate what is meant by the “recognition of moral reasons” and to question the force of these examples as instances where the recognition of moral reasons would be nearly impossible. I have contended, in opposition to the UV argument, that these influences do not make it obviously unfair to blame someone in response to his or her failure to recognize these reasons. Although I will not provide a comprehensive defense of the treatment that is or isn’t due to someone suffering poor formative circumstances, I will briefly return to the case of Abigail and Bert in order to consider whether, even if blame remains appropriate, there may be good reason to modify the way in which blame is expressed to these wrongdoers.

To that end, it is important to distinguish between blame and expressed blame, and various outward expressions of blame that may include reproaching the wrongdoer or demanding an explanation, a justification, or an apology. I also wish to distinguish outward expressions of blame from what Smith describes elsewhere as the element of protest involved in blame. I think that it is important to make this distinction in order to clarify the fact that although blame can be understood as a form of protest in response to wrongdoing, this need not commit one to the view that the protest needs to be outwardly expressed or that it is only appropriate if it is understood by the wrongdoer.99 Now, let us return to Abigail and Bert. Remember, Smith agrees that the fact that certain influences make recognizing moral reasons more difficult does not imply that such circumstances diminish responsibility or that they render blame unfair. Despite her contention that poor formative circumstances do not change an agent’s responsibility or the appropriateness of blame, the reader will recall that Smith leaves room for these influences to make some difference to our criticism of others, claiming that some individuals should be seen as being open to “less serious moral criticism.”100


100 Angela Smith, “Control, Responsibility, and Moral Assessment,” Philosophical Studies 138, no. 3 (2008): 390; and Smith, “Responsibility for Attitudes,” 268. Scanlon himself does not directly address this sort of case in Moral Dimensions, though he does consider the case of a person continues to perceive others in prejudicial terms despite the fact that he recognizes that these are not views that he would otherwise endorse. Let us imagine that this self-conflicted racist has a difficult time ridding himself of his deep prejudices in part because of the circumstances within which he was raised. Scanlon argues that the fact that the person disowns his own reactions results in his views taking on a different significance as compared to someone who views the world with his prejudices intact, while wholeheartedly endorsing them. According to Scanlon, the presence of such prejudices is a sort of moral defect for which the agent is responsible, and that perhaps he ought not to be blamed for them. Scanlon, Moral Dimensions, 195. This case is somewhat different than the one I considered earlier in this chapter, in that the agent who is prejudiced also rejects his prejudicial views as mistaken. This attitudinal complexity complicates the matter of how to understand the relational impairment caused by his attitudes because although he disavows some of his attitudes, they are still present. The cases I cited from Adams, Wolf and Smith are all simpler in that the agent in question does not disavow his attitudes.
So, is there good reason to think, as Smith contends, that Abigail should be treated differently than Bert for the purposes of moral assessment? It seems to me that there is no reason to think that their attitudes fail to be blameworthy and no reason to expect that the genealogical story ought to make a significant difference to our relations with others on the Scanlonian view. If Abigail were to recognize that her attitudes sometimes arise in spite of herself and were to disavow them, this may make some plausible difference to our relations with her. If she took a stand against her own attitudes, this might mean that we would have less reason to avoid her, such as revising our intentions to be involved with her, and the like. As stated in the example, Abigail is not self-divided but, like Bert, is wholehearted in her racist views. The difference, as Smith puts it, is that Bert adopts his views in a “fully reflective way,” whereas Abigail adopts hers in a less than reflective way. This difference does not in itself explain why one ought to be assessed or criticized differently than another or how this makes a difference to the degree of relational impairment. There may be good reasons for thinking that someone like Abigail ought to be blamed differently from someone like Bert, but what might these reasons be on an attributive view of moral responsibility?

One reason I can imagine for thinking that Abigail-type characters ought to be assessed differently than Bert-type characters is that in Abigail’s case, there is the possibility that had she not been exposed to these negative influences, her attitudes may have been altered. In contrast, Bert did not suffer these negative influences and additionally, has already been exposed to these values. He has, in spite of his better fortune, still reflectively adopted racist views. In my opinion, part of what may be confusing the example is that Smith uses the term “reflectively” to describe Bert’s acquisition of racist views and there is an ambiguity as to what is meant by “reflection.” It seems as though there are two main senses in which one might employ the term
“reflectively” to refer to the acquisition of attitudes or beliefs. The first sense refers to the way in which someone comes to acquire an attitude, in contrast with something like the kind of passivity suggested by the acquisition that occurs when someone fails to deliberate upon these attitudes and beliefs. It is important to remember that neither Scanlon nor Smith would want to suggest that these more passive modes of acquisition make one’s attitudes any less than one’s own. Even when one does not consciously deliberate about the content of one’s attitudes, the evaluative judgments that they contain are judgments for which one is responsible and that one can be called upon to defend. Indeed, Smith says this quite explicitly, both about attitudes in general and about the case in question.101

A second sense in which “reflection” may be used is to refer not to the process according to which one acquires values or beliefs, but rather, to the body of knowledge one possesses, and that acts as a backdrop to the assessment of other attitudes and beliefs. It is in this latter sense that I believe that Smith is using the term.102 According to the example, it seems that Abigail is unfortunate, both in that she has acquired negative attitudes that impair her relations with others, and that these attitudes may act as a sort of irrational filter impeding her ability to critically reflect on her own views and that negatively influence the way in which she interprets new information. In contrast, Bert is understood to lack this acquired irrational backdrop. It is not entirely clear whether he had non-racist views when he was younger or whether he lacked views about the subject altogether until adulthood. Regardless of his childhood views, the fact that he was not exposed to racist views and in fact, exposed to morally right views, puts him in a better

101 “Citing the origin of one’s attitude is irrelevant when what is in question is its justification. Our understanding of the circumstances in which a person’s evaluative tendencies were formed may, however, have a very important influence on the kind or degree of moral criticism we think it appropriate to make.” Smith, “Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life,” 268.
102 Ibid., 268.
position to understand morality as he comes to acquire his beliefs and attitudes as an adult. In essence, Bert has a “leg up” as compared to Abigail and, thus, one would think that he should be able to more easily appreciate moral considerations, even if his positive upbringing was not strictly necessary for this recognition.

Still, I have difficulty understanding how the poor or, conversely, beneficial circumstances under which Abigail and Bert were respectively raised would make a difference to blame. That being said, it may be the case that even if both Abigail and Bert are racists and even if both can be blamed for simply possessing these attitudes, there may be reason to think that the difference in how they acquired their attitudes ought to make some difference to the way in which they are treated, or the kind of response that is appropriate in each of their cases. I do, intuitively, find myself sympathetic to the idea that it is appropriate to respond to Bert and Abigail in ways that are slightly different. My inclination, which I consider quite natural, would be to show indignation towards Bert and confront him with something like the following: “Really? You think that some people deserve less respect simply because of their race? How could you endorse that view, especially in light of the opportunities you had to experience and learn about the importance of equality, tolerance, and inclusion? ” My response to Abigail may be something more like: “I know that you grew up in a community where people espoused strong convictions about race, but surely you must have questioned these claims at some point. Maybe you have a mistaken view of the differences between you and others, or of the way that any differences ought to make to the way that you treat them. It is important that you learn more about the experiences of others, that you critically question the basis for your views, and that you learn about the importance of treating others with respect.”
I would likely approach Bert with a sense of greater indignation and a greater sense of confusion, though I would certainly also be indignant toward Abigail. I find myself wanting to approach Abigail differently because of my assumption that her views may still change after being exposed to new experiences, whereas this seems to be unlikely in Bert’s case. I would not want to be so naïve as to assume that Abigail’s attitudes will simply change for the better after being exposed to more experiences or more information, or even that I would be able to describe the nature of the information that will bring about this change. Still, since her past may have deprived her of at least some of these positive influences, I would want to somehow recognize that her attitudes may be both more recalcitrant because of her poor formative influences, and also, that exposure to more morally positive influences may aid her recognition of moral reasons. Despite the fact that I have portrayed Abigail as a “not-quite-a-lost-cause”, and Bert as more of a “lost cause” when it comes to recognizing moral reasons, I would also want to recognize the fact that due to a variety of experiences, patterns of reasoning and the like that may

103 The following real-life case is one where a similar sentiment is expressed regarding poor formative circumstances. A woman leading a discussion and dance group for prisoners describes the mixed views she has of her pupils. While she does not deny that they did wrong when they committed a crime, she also seems to recognize their potential for change, though couching the sentiment in the somewhat suspicious language that their crime-committing selves are not really “who they are.” She notes: “The majority of my guys were teenagers when they committed their crime…I was doing a philosophy class in the prison as I very often do, and I decided to use the quote from Deuteronomy: ‘I set before you life and death. Choose life.’ And for me, what it was about, is nobody is all evil, nobody is all good. At the end of it, a prisoner named Tyrone Taylor, a great guy, came up to me and he said, ‘You know, I really liked your philosophy class a lot, but there was one problem relating it to my life.’ I said, ‘What was that?’ And he said, “We never knew the other choice existed.”” They came from the ghetto. Their parents were in gangs. They survived the underground economy, selling something illegal. They didn’t always know what was right and wrong. They didn’t have good schools, they didn’t have good parenting. They were victims of institutionalized racism. So I don’t see them as criminals. I see them as people who did something really wrong at one point in their lives, made a huge mistake, and that is not who they are.” For the full article, see David Gutnik, “Prisoners Discover the Healing Power of Dance,” CBC News, news story. http://www.cbc.ca/news/prisoners-discover-the-healing-power-of-dance-1.1870669?cmp=rss.
not be readily apparent, Bert may still come to recognize the folly of his ways, unlikely though this may be.\(^{104}\)

One way of articulating the difference between Abigail and Bert is that although I would remain confused as to why either Abigail or Bert retain their views, I would feel that there might be more I could do to help right Abigail’s views, whereas though it may not be impossible for Bert to come to recognize moral reasons, it is not as apparent how this change may occur. Rightly or wrongly, I feel that I would have more reason to try to help Abigail overcome the negative influences to which she was unfortunately exposed. If Bert has developed a hatred for other races through his experiences with others, he may be just as morally ignorant as Abigail, but it is more difficult to see how he could be described as victim. Thus, other things being equal, it seems there is more reason to aid Abigail than Bert.\(^{105}\)

I made a promise at the beginning of this chapter that I would make mention of the notion of protest and how it can be considered independent from expressed blame and communication. I have not fulfilled that promise to this point because I have first been attempting to isolate possible differences between an Abigail-like character who suffered poor formative circumstances and a Bert-like character who also fails to recognize moral reasons, but who does not suffer from poor formative circumstances. I have focused on this task in order to make sense of Smith’s suggestion that this difference might appropriately make some difference to moral criticism. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the idea of blame as a form of communication in

\(^{104}\) Though it is unclear how exactly this change may occur, if change through conscious deliberation seems implausible due to the recalcitrance of Bert’s convictions, one possible mode of change may be through what Nomy Arpaly calls “dawnings”, a term that I mentioned earlier in this discussion. She contends that if someone comes to hold more rational view through this non-conscious thought process, we should still understand this mental change as one that is rational rather than irrational. Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 54.

\(^{105}\) The next chapter will involve further discussion about the extent to which relationships should be understood as involving this duty to aid others when they fail to appreciate moral reasons.
order to assess some of the considerations associated with the decision whether or not to express blame and what form this expression ought to take. I do think that there are normative considerations governing the expression of blame just as there are normative considerations that govern blame itself. Various arguments have been put forth by both Wallace and Watson espousing the inappropriateness of making demands, such as the demand for reasonable regard or the demand to justify an attitude or behaviour when an individual does not understand, and is unable to comply with, the demand.  

Discussions surrounding the expression of blame and the treatment of wrongdoers often invoke the ideas of communication, confrontation, and protest. Reproaching someone, asking for justification, and expressing emotions are all closely associated with the idea of addressing the wrongdoer and engaging them in some form of communication, with the desire of having them acknowledge their wrongdoing. Before discussing the matter of when and whether blame ought to be expressed, I also wish to draw attention to two points about the relation between moral protest and blame. In the first, as mentioned earlier, although blame often involves an element of protest, it is not the case that all forms of protest need to be expressed. In fact, unexpressed blame can arguably be understood as a sort of protest. Secondly, as Smith notes, even if the blameworthy agent does not understand the demands or protests involved in blame, this does not make blame unfair or pointless. The idea that blame is a sort of protest against someone’s ill will or failure to show reasonable regard has been an underlying factor in much of the aforementioned discussion. The alteration of one’s attitudes, intentions, and expectations can all be seen as a protest against certain sorts of ill treatment. When one blames someone, it is not just that one thinks that someone’s ill will gives one reason to avoid her because one finds this

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treatment unpleasant or undesirable. Rather, it is the case that blame involves recognizing that a person’s blameworthy attitudes and evaluations make a claim about one’s moral standing; a claim that is mistaken and one that bears significance for one’s relations with others.

Both Pamela Hieronymi and Angela Smith have persuasively argued for the fact that the alteration of one’s attitudes in response to an agent’s blameworthy attitude should not be understood solely as a way of avoiding future harm, for example, if one fails to confide in or trust someone in the future. Importantly, this attitudinal change should also be understood as a response to a demand for reasonable regard and thus, as a way of challenging, opposing, or even acknowledging the significance of the claims in someone’s attitudes and actions. This view of blame makes sense of the fact that there is still some “point” to blame even if one does not or cannot interact with the blameworthy agent. Smith argues against Scanlon’s claim that blame is not even incipiently communicative, claiming that this view fails to capture the fact that in healthy relationships there is, and arguably should be, a sense in which blame aims to be communicative. In healthy relationships, some form of acknowledgement of wrongdoing is usually required in order for the relationship to continue unimpaired.107

V. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have assessed the idea of recognizing moral reasons, attempting to articulate different ways of understanding this process of recognition and, conversely, of what it means to fail to recognize moral reasons. I have drawn from the philosophical literature in order to

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107 Although I agree that this sort of acknowledgement is ideal, especially in situations of more serious wrongdoing, I think it is worth noting both that relationships often continue, though remain impaired. I think that it would also be mistaken to claim that this acknowledgement is always explicit or need always be explicit. For example, if Inattentive Ian is inattentive to the needs of his friend, Dorothy, who acts distant in return, it may be that his asking her to coffee more regularly is understood as a sort of acknowledgement of his previous inattentiveness, even if it remains unsaid. In this example, I would take Dorothy’s intention to avoid or to fail to confide in Ian as a sort of protest, and Ian’s intentions and actions as a sort of acknowledgement though the words “I’m sorry for being an inattentive friend” may remain unuttered.
to make sense of circumstances that may be thought to limit or hinder one’s ability to recognize moral reasons. Admittedly, I have been skeptical of the extent to which circumstances would necessarily hinder one’s ability to recognize moral reasons in practice, thus calling into question the concern raised by proponents of the Unfair Victim argument, even on their own terms. Despite my skepticism of the widespread nature of these cases, I maintain, along with Scanlon and Smith and in opposition to proponents of the UV argument, that blame is appropriate as long as the agent has the capacity to recognize moral reasons in principle, given his or her status as a rational being. I have also introduced the distinction between blame and expressed blame along with the idea of blame as a form of communication and protest.

In the next chapter, I will assess the plausibility of conceiving of blame as a form of communication, as is contended by Coleen Macnamara and Angela Smith. Although I ultimately reject this conception of blame, I do discuss the way that certain expressions of blame can be understood as forms of communication. I also explain why although I agree that there are cases when it is appropriate for poor formative circumstances to modify one’s treatment of a wrongdoer, this does not entail that blame itself ought to be modified. A better explanation of the way in which expressions of blame can be understood as communicative will help to clarify why I contend that reasons to modify expressions of blame still ought to be weighed against the good reasons there are to express blame to a wrongdoer; even an unfortunate one.
Chapter 4: Blame, Communication and the Treatment of Unfortunate Wrongdoers

“Forget not, never forget that you have promised me to use this silver to become an honest man.”\textsuperscript{108}  

\textit{(Victor Hugo, Les Misérables)}

“…his knees suddenly bent under him, as if an invisible power overwhelmed him at a blow, with the weight of his bad conscience.”\textsuperscript{109}  

\textit{(Les Misérables)}

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I will consider the way in which the sorts of poor formative circumstances mentioned earlier ought to bear on the treatment of a wrongdoer and, more specifically, on expressions of blame. I have already explained why I think there is good reason to reject the claim that poor formative circumstances make blame unfair. I noted that as I understand it, blame need not involve any outwards manifestations or expressions. Blame can be distinguished from expressions of blame. Although a failure to express blame may seem to be more the exception than the rule when one has been wronged, this failure to express blame may be accounted for by various commonplace considerations. Such considerations may include the fact that she who has been wronged may feel that expressions of blame will be pointless unless the person who is being blamed can either witness or perhaps understand the significance of these expressions. For example, one may fail to express blame to someone with whom one no longer keeps company, even though one continues to blame him or her. One may fail to blame someone who has done something so egregious that it seems impossible that the significance of these expressions will be understood. The distinction drawn between blame and expressions of blame could, on first blush,


\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 68.
seem to be a sort of “solution” to the problem of how hold others morally responsible, while recognizing the hardship posed by poor formative circumstances.

I have, thus far, contended that poor formative circumstances do not provide grounds for thinking that blame is unfair, versus the UV argument, despite the fact that they may pose a hardship to those who suffer their ill effects. If blame can be distinguished from its expressions, this would seem to allow for the possibility that one could still judge an unfortunate wrongdoer as blameworthy and blame him while also taking his poor circumstances into consideration when expressing blame. For example, if great suffering arises from such persons being subject to certain types of expressions of blame, then it may be thought cruel to knowingly bring about or perpetuate that suffering.

Both T. M. Scanlon and Robert Adams claim that there are situations in which it may be morally problematic to express blame, at least to express it in certain ways or to a certain extent. Scanlon claims that there is reason to avoid treating others in a way that can be considered cruel, but denies that all expressions of blame ought to be considered cruel. He claims, for example, that there is a difference between how one could characterize the moral status of the act of berating a wrongdoer and the act of explaining wrongdoing to the wrongdoer. Likewise, Adams does not deny that there may be circumstances in which reproach is appropriate, but warns that it has the possibility of becoming “unmerciful and vindictive.” Despite these warnings, it is important to note that both Scanlon and Adams recognize that although expressions of blame may be difficult for the wrongdoer to endure, this is not in and of itself

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110 Note that the wrongdoer may not fully understand the significance of his wrongdoing, as mentioned in earlier chapters, though he may still experience ill-effects from being excluded and reproached.
111 Scanlon, What We Owe To Each Other, 187.
morally problematic. A closer assessment of different sorts of expressions of blame will help to make clear when an expression of blame ought to be considered morally dubious and when it might be difficult to bear, but morally acceptable.

There are legitimate concerns to take into account when considering the effects of expressions of blame. If expressions are curtailed, then there are also concerns associated with curtailing valuable outcomes associated with expressions of blame. Adams discusses what I think is a particularly important consideration associated with expressions of blame. Namely, that there is a fact of the matter, or moral reality, that blame identifies, like the fact that it is wrong for someone to overlook his duties to fellow human beings. Expressing blame often contributes to the recognition and acknowledgment of moral reasons, including the fact of wrongdoing and impairment that arise as a consequence. For example, imagine the following: An office worker, Frieda, is constantly ridiculed and disregarded by her co-workers. Although she blames them and attempts to avoid them, she does not outwardly reproach them. In this case, Frieda is right to recognize that she ought to be treated with respect, but her failure to express blame could appear to indicate a lack of self-respect or a failure to properly recognize the significance of the wrongdoing that she suffers. It may also be that her co-workers will never come to reflect upon the significance of their actions without being confronted by Frieda’s expressions of blame. In assessing what it means to express blame and when it is appropriate to do so, I will consider the claim put forth by both Colleen Macnamara and Angela Smith that blame *itself* can be understood as a form of communication. While I ultimately reject this claim, I

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113 Note at a later point the way in which this claim about when one ought to communicate or not may be coloured by particular circumstances: for example, in this case, Frieda continues to have to interact with her co-workers while they continue to abuse her. In this case, as in the others, I find interesting that someone is actually negatively influenced by these past circumstances, rather than having simply suffered them and remaining unscathed.
hope that by analyzing it, it will become clearer why I believe that blame itself should not be understood as implicitly communicative.

One of the central aims of this chapter is to answer the question of whether or not modifying expressions of blame is a defensible way of responding to the unfortunate circumstances that sometimes negatively influence wrongdoers. My assessment of this question will proceed in the following manner. First, I will set aside the issues concerning expressions of blame and its relation to poor formative circumstances and return to the more basic issue of distinguishing between blame and expressions of blame. A clearer sense of this distinction is necessary in order to better understand a variety of other important questions, including whether or how blame is a form of communication, whether all expressions of blame are forms of communication and if so, whether the appropriateness of blame or its expression is grounded in facts about communication. Second, I will consider whether and how the purported communicative dimensions of blame ought to bear upon decisions about whether or how to express blame to unfortunate wrongdoers. Lastly, I will consider whether it is defensible to modify the treatment of wrongdoers with regards to expressions of blame either to prevent cruelty, to show mercy or both – and whether one can do so without violating other important moral norms.

II. Blame, Communication and Acknowledgement

i) Blame and Expressions of Blame

It may seem obvious that expressed blame can be distinguished from blame and that not all instances of blame are expressed. Some may think that even if this distinction can be made in particular instances, it is questionable whether any sufficient set of criteria could be provided to distinguish blame from expressions of blame, given that both blame and expressions of blame
can be manifested in so many different ways. Although there are a variety of ways in which one may characterize these expressions of blame, I will describe two general ways of conceiving of these expressions. I will then explain why, although I favour a more expansive view of expressions of blame, I will place my focus will be on a narrower subset of these expressions when considering whether poor formative circumstances ought to have some role to play in expressing blame. One may consider a deliberate statement like “I blame you” as the best sort of example of an expression of blame. Alternatively, one may consider “expressions” in a more expansive sense, as not restricted to intentional utterances but, rather, as also encompassing utterances or actions that have the potential to convey blame independently of the wrongdoer’s conscious intentions.\endnote{114}{My focus is on the decisions of the wronged in whether or how to express blame. I would not want to deny that it is sometimes appropriate for those other than the wrongdoer to express blame, but this is not my primary focus. It is also important to note that there are important issues regarding “standing to blame” that are raised in making such distinctions. Note also, that I am not sure what I think of whether or not one can have an “unconscious intention.” This may be defensible, but I will be primarily using intention to refer to conscious intentions.}{for fn:114}

For example, someone may treat a wrongdoer with disdain without consciously realizing that he blames the wrongdoer or that his treatment is likely an expression of blame. The fact that someone avoids another unconsciously may sometimes be understood as an expression of blame. On this expanded conception of “expressions of blame,” it is both necessary and sufficient that the attitudes and actions considered as expressions are rooted in the kind of attitudes or judgments indicative of blame, whether or not one is conscious of them. For instance, if someone treats a wrongdoer with disdain because of his race instead of his wrongdoing or if she avoids him simply because she finds him irritating, these actions could look similar to expressions of blame, but would not count as such because of the nature of the underlying attitudes.\endnote{115}{On the view I favour, this refers to the modification of attitudes, intentions, or expectations (or all) in response to relational impairment.}{for fn:115}

This expanded conception of expressions of blame may seem reasonable, but it can be countered that expressions of blame, properly understood, require conscious
intentions on the part of the person who blames. There are two main reasons why I think that this intuitively appealing view is ultimately less defensible as a way of understanding expressions of blame.

First, as a matter of everyday experience, it would not seem mistaken for a wrongdoer to confront someone claiming: “You blame me, even though you never utter the words.” He may be able to discern what could rightfully be called expressions of blame, despite the other’s intention to limit any overt expressions. Likewise, it may be possible that neither the wronged nor the wrongdoer recognize that blame is being expressed. The wrongdoer, as he reflects on his own attitudes, may eventually come to re-interpret his past actions as expressions of blame. He may now understand that his making excuses not to attend coffee dates with the wrongdoer is not due so much to his being busy as much to the fact that he has altered his attitude toward his friend and blames him for some past wrongdoing. It seems that these examples and descriptions are neither nonsensical nor out of the ordinary. Secondly, this view is more in keeping with the non-volitional view of responsibility that I favour, in that it recognizes that one’s evaluative judgments may not always be conscious, and that they may give rise to patterns of awareness, reasoning or actions which are still rightly something for which one can be asked to answer and be considered responsible.

Although I believe that this expanded conception of “expressions of blame” is ultimately more favourable than one requiring intentions to express blame, the defensibility of the expanded conception will not be the main focus of this chapter. Rather, I will focus on “expressions of blame” that one consciously undertakes. It is important to note that this narrower employment of expressions still leaves room for recognizing the diversity involved in intentional expressions of blame. These expressions may include utterances involving explanations, demands, or words of
reproach, along with acts involving denunciation, avoidance, or exclusion. These intentional expressions of blame may vary, but could include the demand for an explanation of the wrongdoing, as well as a demand that the wrongdoer recognize the act as wrong or demonstrate remorse. Some expressions of blame are less confrontational and may include avoiding someone, not only as a consequence of one’s intention to no longer keep company, but also in the hopes that the person will understand the avoidance as an expression of blame. My reason for employing this narrower definition of “expressions of blame” is due to my restricted focus on the decisions made concerning the expression of blame if one has suffered poor formative circumstances.\textsuperscript{116}

Even when discussing a restricted account of “expressions of blame,” there is still much that needs to be specified, given that these expressions may refer to a variety of utterances and actions. My next task will be to consider whether these conscious expressions of blame can be understood as communicative, and if so, to whom they are addressed. The answers to these questions are pertinent insofar as they contribute to understanding whether or how one ought to express blame in light of poor formative circumstances. Although my focus will be on the communicative aspect of expressed blame, it is important to note the contention of some that blame itself is communicative, whether or not it is expressed. Both Angela Smith and Coleen Macnamara argue that blame ought to be understood as communicative and as seeking some sort

\textsuperscript{116} It is simply easier to speak of the more basic case, like the norms one ought to consider when one is aware of choosing to express blame. I want to reiterate that this is not to say that other expressions of blame are any less of an expression than others, or matters for which one is less responsible. Just as there are considerations that one ought to take into account when consciously deciding how to express blame, I want to leave open the possibility that there may be considerations that one ought to undertake in order to ascertain whether or not one is unintentionally expressing blame. For example, it may be the case that there are good reasons for thinking that one ought to engage in deliberate self-reflection or to take steps to become more aware of one’s attitude and actions if one is prone to express blame in ways that are inappropriate. For example, imagine that a co-worker has committed a legitimate wrong in flippantly disregarding one’s contribution to a project. The wronged understandably takes this disrespect to impair her relationship with her co-worker, but she judges the impairment to be more significant than is reasonable, as is often her tendency. As interesting as these cases are, I will be limiting my discussions on them in order to focus on what I take to be the simpler, if not more common, way of referring to “expressions of blame.”
of acknowledgement or reply. For my part, I claim that there are good reasons to be skeptical of
this view of blame, largely because of considerations having to do with the good reasons a
particular individual may have for not seeking to communicate blame or seeking a reply from the
wrongdoer. Macnamara’s account is thought provoking, but ultimately draws on an evolutionary
explanation of blame that overlooks the normative deliberations associated with both blame and
the decisions to express it. Smith’s account includes claims that I accept, such as the fact that
blame involves rejecting the claims inherent in the wrongdoing, and that apologies are an often-
appropriate response to blame. However, I deny that these observations can provide adequate
grounds for the conclusion that blame itself is communicative.

I will now turn to discussing whether blame can be understood as a form of
communication by considering the arguments of both Smith and Macnamara. I will spend more
time engaging with Smith’s unique but Scanlonian-inspired account of blame than with
Macnamara’s account of blame, one that strongly emphasizes the reactive attitudes as
constitutive of blame. Both Smith and Macnamara are united in claiming that blame, even if
unexpressed, should be understood as communicative insofar as it implicitly seeks uptake or
acknowledgment. I will discuss this view of blame, but not exhaustively, for whether or not
unexpressed blame itself can be described as communicative or as a form of protest, it does not
directly bear on my main contention that blame is not unfair in light of poor formative
circumstances. Even if it could be successfully argued that blame is implicitly communicative in
that it always seeks acknowledgement this would still not make blame unfair in the
circumstances cited by proponents of the UV argument. That being said, I remain skeptical of the
evidence used to claim that blame should always be described as communicative and as seeking
acknowledgement. I will now turn to considering this characterization of blame, explaining how I believe it falls short.

**ii) The Communicative Aspect of Blame**

Both Macnamara and Smith describe blame as communicative because of the sense in which it can be understood as seeking uptake or acknowledgement from others.¹¹⁷ Macnamara contends that this communicative element is directed toward the wrongdoer with the aim of eliciting some “uptake” from him or her. For her part, Smith leaves open the possibility that this communication may be directed toward those other than the wrongdoer and, thus that acknowledgement may also be sought from them. I provide a brief overview of these two views in the hopes that the discussion of the relation of blame to communication will prove fruitful for later discussions concerning the communicative aspect of expressions of blame, narrowly understood.

Macnamara offers a characterization of blame that claims that it is best understood in terms of the reactive attitudes, forms of address that seek uptake from the addressee (i.e. the wrongdoer).¹¹⁸ Macnamara, of course, realizes that blame is not always expressed, but thinks that a distinction can be drawn between communicative acts of intentional expression and the “private mental states” that she maintains should be considered as communicative entities, analogous to messages.¹¹⁹ The messages and entities she considers analogous to blame can be described as possessing representational content and possess what she calls a “non-intentional

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¹¹⁷ I use uptake and acknowledgement as interchangeable.


¹¹⁹ Ibid., 7.
purposiveness.”  She argues that reactive attitudes, even if unexpressed, can be understood as messages “eliciting uptake of their representational content in a recipient,” whether this uptake involves the alteration of a wrongdoer’s beliefs or the production of an emotional response. Macnamara’s view of blame draws upon theories of function ascription to explain how the particular effects of a thing can be understood as defining the function of that thing. She uses the example of the presence of hearts in the human body that can be explained, at least in part, by the pumping effect of past human hearts. She writes, “Pumping blood is a function of hearts because past token hearts pumped blood, and this, at least in part, explains why current token hearts exist.” She draws from the literature on evolutionary psychology, arguing that many basic emotions are “hardwired” to be expressed through facial expressions, which are then recognized by others from whom emotional responses are elicited. She also argues that, based on experience, the kind of representational content involved in a wrongdoer’s guilt involves an uptake of the kind of representational content involved in resentment and indignation, the reactive attitudes constitutive of blame. Macnamara claims that even if blame is not deliberately expressed in particular cases, it is still the case that other expressions, such as facial expressions, can be used to define the function of blame more generally.

On Macnamara’s account, given that all blame seeks uptake from the wrongdoer, blame, even if unexpressed, remains a sort of mistake or “misinvocation” when directed toward the

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120 Ibid., 9.
121 Ibid., 9.
122 Ibid., 10.
123 Ibid., 12.
124 Ibid., 13, especially footnote 24.
morally incompetent. According to Macnamara, blame is a communicative entity in line with the functional account that she uses to analyze blame. Setting aside the issue of moral competence, I remain skeptical of an account of blame that relies on a functional description seemingly unrelated to the reasoning of those who blame, ascribing them instead to the unconscious workings of evolutionary mechanisms. It seems to me that in considering whether or not blame is communicative, it is important to consider the various reasons people have for communicating or not communicating blame. As noted earlier, I realize that someone may blame or express blame without being fully conscious of the fact, but this need not commit me to Macnamara’s view whereby all blame is communicative. One could, either consciously or less consciously, blame or express blame because of certain evaluative judgments that one has made. It may not always be obvious to oneself that one is blaming someone, and it may sometimes take analysis and reflection to come to grips with the judgments being made, but this does not imply that all blame is like this or that all blame is communicative.

Macnamara also contends that the “non-intentional expressive” behaviours associated with certain emotions help to explain why blame itself should be understood as a communicative entity. Certain “signatures” produce responses in others that help to explain the existence of the emotions that are constitutive of blame. She goes on to clarify: “However, the fact that some emotions, via their facial expressions, elicit emotional uptake of their representational content certainly lends some credence to the idea that past token reactive emotions have done so.” Because Macnamara favours this etiological account of the function of blame, and because she argues that these emotions are not under one’s direct control, she denies that the status of blame

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125 Ibid., 25. I have raised questions earlier about what this status comes to; whether it means that someone would never be able to acknowledge wrongdoing in principle, that this is practically impossible given their current ways of reasoning or that they are in some other state.

126 Ibid., 13.
as a communicative entity is dependent upon any decision of he who blames.\textsuperscript{127} Rather, the functional evolutionary account that she favours is more concerned with how various typical non-intentional indicators of any given emotion play an adaptive role in conveying the emotion to others and in provoking some uptake of the content of that emotion.\textsuperscript{128} She claims that to care about morality means to be susceptible to certain reactive attitudes and their accompanying non-intentional indicators, such as facial expressions. She argues that because evidence of these emotions has contributed to the health of the “moral community” by evoking guilt and facilitating relational repair, current tokens of resentment and indignation can be understood in terms of this more general explanatory story. She writes, “There is, then, an explanatory line that runs from past instances of resentment and indignation to the existence of current tokens. The fact that past reactive attitudes have led to sincere moral acknowledgement of fault in part explains the health and strength of the moral community, which in turn in part explains the moral agents’ commitment to and care for moral values, which finally, in part, explains the existence of current tokens of resentment and indignation.”\textsuperscript{129} Macnamara thus asserts that blame is communicative, in light of this functional account.

I will use the emotion of resentment to discuss why I reject Macnamara’s claim that blame is invariably communicative. Some disagreement can be accounted for by the fact that I do not consider blame to presuppose the presence of reactive attitudes. Even so, let us imagine that I accept the view of blame as being characterized by reactive attitudes as I explain why I think there is good reason to avoid describing blame as communicative. Imagine that in one’s typical reaction to becoming resentful is to become red in the face, to narrow one’s eyes, and to

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 14–16.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 11–14.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 15.
scowl. There may be many good reasons why one does not wish to demonstrate these indications of resentment to others: one may feel that it is inappropriate; one may want to preserve a sense of dignity; or one may feel that the wrongdoer would take pleasure in having caused an emotional reaction, motivating one to withhold any overt expressions of it. These are just a few of the many reasons that someone may have for not wanting to express blame. Macnamara accepts that expressed blame may vary along with an agent’s particular purposes, but still maintains that blame itself should be understood as communicative when considered in terms of a causal etiologically based understanding of function.¹³⁰

The way blame manifests itself physically may have some role to play in the understanding of evolutionary biology: perhaps blame could be described as communicative in this evolutionary sense in virtue of the presence of biological indicators of emotion. That being said, as in the aforementioned case of resentment, I believe that it is misleading to describe blame as communicative in general. Even if blame could be understood as communicative in the evolutionary sense, this would not necessarily explain the role of blame or expressions of blame in any particular relationship. For example, Macnamara notes that although she may use her stapler as a doorstop, the function of the stapler could be described in terms of its role as a doorstop, but its etiological function would still be to fasten papers.¹³¹ In the analogous case of blame, this would then be tantamount to claiming that although someone may try to avoid communicating her resentment, there would still be a sense in which the function of her resentment should be understood as communicative.

¹³⁰ “Imagine I use my stapler to hold my door ajar. In this case, the stapler seeks, in the sense indexed to my aim, to hold the door ajar and seeks, in the sense indexed to its etiological function, to fasten papers. People often use objects and activities for purposes other than the one tied to their etiological functions.” Ibid., 17–18.
¹³¹ Ibid., 17–18.
I believe that Macnamara’s description of blame as invariably communicative is misleading because its characterization of blame in terms of a broader non-normative causal story fails to attend to the normative considerations associated with an individual’s decision about whether or not to communicate blame. According to her account, one’s reasoning cannot bear on whether or not blame is to be understood as communicative. The way that Macnamara approaches the question of whether blame is communicative is on a sort of macro level concerned with the matter of why and how blame has persisted in social communities. There is a sense in which she and I are concerned with different matters altogether. Not only do I disagree with her account of blame as characterized by resentment and indignation, I am also more concerned with the question of whether or not an individual ought to attempt to communicate blame to a wrongdoer. Even if her description of blame is defensible according to a causal, evolutionary account, it does not directly bear on my inquiry. That being said, I explained earlier why I think that there is good reason to favour a different view of blame. I also maintain that describing blame as communicative on the basis of this functional, social account is misleading, given that instances of blame occur at the level of the individual and that it is ultimately the individual who must decide whether or not there is good reason for attempting to communicate blame to a particular wrongdoer. Although Macnamara’s account of blame as communicative is rooted in her understanding of blame as characterized by the reactive attitudes, not all those who consider blame to be communicative favour this account. For example, Smith also construes blame as communicative, though she does not ascribe to Macnamara’s account of blame. Although her account is distinct, I also believe that there is reason to reject Smith’s claim that blame is communicative, but for different, albeit for distinctly different reasons.
To begin with, Smith describes blame as being communicative in two ways: first, in that it registers and challenges the existence of wrongdoing and second, in that it also seeks recognition and acknowledgement of wrongdoing. She maintains that the Scanlonian view of blame, though correct in emphasizing the alteration of attitudes, falls short in its inability to distinguish between alterations of attitudes that ought to be considered constitutive of blame and those that are not. Smith argues that since only those attitudes that are altered as a form of protest qualify as moral blame, Scanlon’s account captures too much and problematically allows for “false positives”. She is also concerned that Scanlon’s account of blame lacks the relational features that he otherwise takes pains to emphasize. Smith charges that Scanlon fails to adequately capture blame’s communicative features and the sense in which it is a form of moral address. She describes the Scanlonian account as lacking in this way: “Blame appears to be a reaction to damage already done, not an invitation to the other party in the relationship to take steps to repair (or, more hopefully, head off) that damage.”

Smith’s articulation of blame as not just communicative but, rather, as a form of protest is inspired by both the work of both Pamela Hieronymi and Bernard Boxill. They, like Smith, emphasize that either resentment in the former case, or protest in the latter case, have an important role to play in blame, a role that is independent of whether the wrongdoer acknowledges or is able to acknowledge his wrongdoing. It may not be possible to communicate with or to reform the wrongdoer, but in these views, blame or protest can serve an important role in “marking out” and “challenging” the claims of others as well as “affirming” various counter-


133 Though Macnamara does not employ the terminology of ‘protest’, I do think that her account could be described in such terms insofar as resentment or indignation involves recognizing a wrong, perhaps challenging that wrong and seeking acknowledgement, though her account differs in important ways from Smith.
claims. It seems to me that this description of blame seems similar to the way that one might describe the sort of reasoning that takes place as one that often both precedes and is implicated in blame itself. This reasoning occurs when one comes to realize the significance of the wrongdoing one has suffered and the impairment that it causes to a relationship. I do see the appeal of using more active language such as “challenging” and “protesting” to describe this process of recognition but if, as Smith and others contend, this process remains wholly internal at times, then this language merely seems to be a more animated way of describing what already occurs in cases of Scanlonian blame. For example, imagine that a friend betrays me, I recognize this act as blameworthy, and that the impairment caused by the act becomes significant enough to alter my attitudes; to blame. This may very well involve a process of recognizing claims such as “I am not due this treatment,” “He has no right to treat me this way,” “I am worthy of respect,” and the like. The language of “challenge,” “affirmation,” and “protest” may be a helpful way to understand the sort of reasoning that takes place when one blames and in this sense, it may remain useful. Whether these forms of reasoning are also best described as being implicitly communicative is perhaps more doubtful. I can understand the sense in which affirming certain claims could be understood as a process of self-communication, but then again, I wonder whether this description has significant advantages over describing the process as one of reasoning.\(^\text{134}\)

I imagine that Smith would reject my attempt to use her language of protest in the way that I have been suggesting. She distinguishes her account from Scanlon’s in part by her insistence that Scanlon’s account of blame is too “one-sided” and falls short in that it seems

\(^{134}\)That is, unless all reasoning is a form of self-communication, but then that would seem unnecessarily complicated.
difficult to understand as a form of “moral address” to the wrongdoer. This is because the first sense in which blame is communicative is, for Smith, closely tied with the second sense whereby blame is communicative, as something that seeks a response from the wrongdoer or from others in the moral community. This acknowledgement is needed in order for the threat posed by wrongdoing to be removed through repudiation or apology, assumedly so the relationship can persist, repaired and unimpaired. I am more critical of this second claim that blame is communicative, in the sense that it always implicitly looks for moral acknowledgement and recognition. Rather, I contend that blame can still be understood in terms of relationships, distinguished from both judgments of blameworthiness and from other modifications of attitudes while denying that it is implicitly communicative. I also argue that there are good reasons for thinking that the communicative aims sometimes associated with blame are not unconditional and implicit in blame itself but, rather, should be understood as varying in accordance with an individual’s reasoning. As I will explain, there are various reasons why one may blame another but fail to seek acknowledgement or recognition from the wrongdoer. These reasons seem to have been overlooked by Smith’s account.

Let us return to the second aspect of the communicative nature of blame. As I have noted, this second aspect of communication is closely related to the first given that the challenge posed by blame is also a way of implicitly seeking acknowledgement from the wrongdoer or community. It is for this reason that Smith would reject my re-interpretation of the first aspect of blame as simply a form of reasoning that need not be communicative. Indeed, she contends that blame is communicative, specifically as a form of protest, in that it registers and challenges the claim implicit in an agent’s wrongdoing, and also in that this challenge implicitly seeks

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acknowledgement and recognition of wrongdoing.\textsuperscript{136} This claim is both more complex and more contentious than the first. This is because, as I noted above, there is a fairly uncontentious way of interpreting the terms involved in the first claim: “recognition” and “challenge” can arguably be understood as the sorts of activities that occur whenever one reasons about the nature of wrongdoing and realizes the mistaken claims that are implicit in wrongdoing.\textsuperscript{137} I am not convinced that Smith’s second claim is open to the same sort of reinterpretation.

A few matters need to be specified about the second claim before I turn to its assessment. There is both the matter of from whom acknowledgement is sought and, also, a question of the sort of acknowledgement that is claimed to be sought. Regarding the first matter, Smith thinks that this acknowledgement may be sought from the wrongdoer, from others, or from both. Regarding the second, it is important to note that the acknowledgement that is sought will be different depending on whether it is sought from wrongdoer or whether it is sought from others more generally. The protest that Smith takes to be inherent in blame will have to differ as well. Remember that she writes: “Such protest implicitly seeks some kind of moral acknowledgement on the part of the blameworthy agent and/or on the part of others in the moral community.”\textsuperscript{138} As articulated, the moral acknowledgement that is being sought is a response to the protest inherent in blame, whether or not that blame is expressed.

\textsuperscript{136} Recall Smith’s Moral Protest Account “To blame another is to judge that she is blameworthy (i.e., to judge that she has attitudes that impair her relations with others) and to modify one’s own attitude, intentions, and expectations toward that person as a way of protesting (i.e., registering and challenging) the moral claim implicit in her conduct, where such protest implicitly seeks some kind of moral acknowledgement on the part of the blameworthy agent and/or others in the moral community.” Smith, “Moral Blame and Moral Protest,” 43.

\textsuperscript{137} That being said, I have explained why I think that Smith would still reject this interpretation given the second sense in which blame is understood as communicative in her account.

\textsuperscript{138} Smith, “Moral Blame and Moral Protest,” 43.
In cases where the protest is directed toward the wrongdoer and the acknowledgement is sought from that person, this seeking will be directed toward the individual who, either overtly or through his actions, makes the claim that is being protested by blame. On first blush, this claim would seem to be intuitively right. When one person blames another, there is often some response sought, one that is appropriate to the wrongdoing. Smith notes “In healthy relationships, these sorts of modifications will usually prompt precisely the sort of moral acknowledgement we seek and thereby head off a more serious impairment to the relationship.”\footnote{Ibid., 40.} I largely agree with a version of this latter claim if only “seek” were changed to the more conditional claim “often seek”. It is important to remember that the actual assertion being put forth by Smith is not merely the conditional claim that blame usually brings about moral acknowledgement or that we often seek acknowledgement. Rather, the claim being made is the stronger: that all blame implicitly seeks acknowledgement from the wrongdoer.

As I will explain later, I see ample reason for rejecting this claim that all blame implicitly seeks moral recognition or acknowledgement, while conceding that the idea of seeking acknowledgement in conjunction with blame, even from those other than the wrongdoer, is not, itself, a strange idea. There may be cases when, as Smith observes, it strengthens relational bonds with others to corporately recognize the effects of past wrongdoings, to take the time to acknowledge these wrongs, and to denounce, even if we ourselves were never involved in their perpetration. Smith’s claim is that when this acknowledgement is sought from others, it is sought implicitly. This acknowledgement is, as stated, a response to the protest that she characterizes as inherent in blame. In order to assess whether or not this claim is tenable, and whether the recognition is sought from the wrongdoer, from others, or both, it is important to consider the
plausibility of this claim in terms of two interrelated questions: first, what does it mean to *implicitly* seek acknowledgement of one’s blame, and secondly, what *kind* of acknowledgement is it claimed that is being sought implicitly through blame? I will consider these questions as they apply, primarily to acknowledgement sought from the wrongdoer and secondarily, as they apply to acknowledgment sought from others more generally. It is worth reiterating that my analysis of these claims is largely in the service of my broader aim of assessing those instances when it is, or is not, appropriate to express blame, particularly in light of a wrongdoer’s poor formative circumstances.

Regarding the first question: how is one to understand the claim made by both Macnamara and Smith that blame, even if unexpressed, implicitly seeks acknowledgement from a wrongdoer? The claim seems to imply that there is something about blame, independent of the aims of she who blames, which can be described as seeking something in return. This all seems a little abstract, but in the hopes of making things clearer, I will draw on an analogy that Macnamara uses in her assessment of Smith. In her example, Macnamara speaks of blame and, in particular, the reactive attitudes constitutive of blame as akin to a letter, in particular, an “open letter.” Whereas a “standard letter” is addressed to someone in particular, like an individual, John Smith, an open letter, while still addressed to John Smith, is also written and published in such a way that others are meant to be able to access its contents. Blame, understood as a sort of “open” letter by Macnamara is best understood as being addressed to the wrongdoer. Blame, or the letter, can be understood as being addressed to the wrongdoer whether or not one actually expresses blame, that is, sends the letter. Likewise, whether or not the letter is mailed, i.e.

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140 Macnamara is supportive of the view that blame seeks acknowledgement, but critical of Smith’s claim that this acknowledgement could be sought from the wrongdoer, others, or both. Rather, she contends that the implicitly communicative nature of blame as a form of address would imply that blame is always addressed to the wrongdoer. Macnamara, “Blame, Communication and Morally Responsible Agency,” 16–18.
expressed, or left sitting on the desk, i.e. unexpressed, Macnamara contends that it can be described as seeking acknowledgement either way. She also uses the example to point out some tension in the language of Smith’s account. More specifically, Smith both speaks of blame as implicitly seeking moral acknowledgement, like the letter, whether or not it is sent, while at other times using a language suggesting that the seeking of this acknowledgment might be contingent on other factors, describing blame as involving a “desire that the wrongdoer morally acknowledge his wrongdoing.” ¹⁴¹ Unlike Macnamara, however, I believe it would be less controversial for Smith to contend that blame’s seeking of acknowledgement is dependent upon an agent’s particular desires. Thus, I have chosen to focus on what I consider to be Smith’s more controversial claim that blame implicitly and unconditionally seeks acknowledgement. To that end, I will make use of Macnamara’s letter analogy in order to assess both her and Smith’s claim that blame implicitly seeks acknowledgement.

Although Macnamara uses the letter analogy somewhat differently in her paper, I will stipulate, for my purposes, that a mailed letter is analogous to expressed blame, that an unmailed letter is analogous to unexpressed blame, and a letter that is locked away is analogous to unexpressed blame that one deliberately intends to conceal. This will, I hope, help to assess the plausibility of the rather abstract claim that blame implicitly seeks acknowledgement. Smith would seemingly have to contend that acknowledgement is sought in all three cases of the letter analogy, but then one might reply “Of course, it’s a letter, it’s not merely about someone, rather, it’s addressed to someone.” One would be correct, but then it seems that the analogy may not be as illuminating as originally thought if it begs the question about blame seeking

acknowledgement, assuming that all letters seek acknowledgement.\textsuperscript{142} Because of this concern, I will change the analogy yet again and consider the plausibility of blame understood as a journal rather than a letter.\textsuperscript{143} Journal entries (i.e. blame) may be torn out and shown to someone i.e. expressed. Journal entries may be more a matter of observation than something that is addressed to someone, but, then again, some journal entries are written as if one imagines the other person present or as reading one’s thoughts. The question boils down to which view is more defensible: blame characterized as a letter, addressed to someone and as implicitly seeking acknowledgement or blame characterized as a journal entry? At times, journal entries only involve reflections such as “I can’t trust John anymore given what he’s done” while at other times they involve conversations addressed to the wrongdoer, whether or not they are expressed, such as “John, I can’t trust you anymore . . .” This analogy only allows one to get so far in thinking about these distinctions, so I will turn to addressing what I consider to be a difficult case for Smith’s account: blame that is left unexpressed, but that she contends implicitly seeks acknowledgement. As I will explain, there is a sense in which I think that unexpressed blame may sometimes seek acknowledgement, although I disagree with the claim that blame seeks acknowledgement invariably.

There are times when it makes sense to construe blame as seeking acknowledgement, even if it remains unexpressed. Even so, I would not want to construe this seeking as implicit,

\textsuperscript{142} I am not sure about whether or not this is the case. There is much that could be discussed about what exactly is meant by “address.” The accounts such as Macnamara’s that make use of the term “address” are often accounts that favour claim that acknowledgement or “uptake” is sought through blame. Rather than determining whether it makes sense to characterize blame as implicitly a form of address by discussing the idea of address, I am assessing whether it makes sense to think of blame as always seeking acknowledgement (and thereby, by my understanding, whether it is best characterized as a form of address). Note that even if I do not support the claim that blame is invariably a form of address, this need not commit me to the view that it is \textit{never} a form of address. In fact, my own view is that blame may be directed toward someone as a form of address in that it seeks acknowledgement in certain cases, but in my view, the seeking of acknowledgement would be agent-dependent, rather than dependent on blame itself.

\textsuperscript{143} Thanks to Rahul Kumar for noting this possible analogy.
since this language suggests that the communicative aim is independent of the agent’s own reasoning. Indeed, I posit that there are good reasons for thinking that the communicative aims of blame are contingent on an agent’s reasoning. I think that part of the reason why Smith considers blame as implicitly seeking acknowledgement is because she wants to capture the sense in which blame is relational and often an important part of repairing relationships that are impaired. Furthermore, I maintain that one can still assert that blame is best understood in terms of the relationships within which impairment occurs, without adopting Smith’s account. Claiming that relational impairment is best understood in terms of particular relational standards need not commit one to claiming that blame implicitly seeks acknowledgement. The following examples are meant to cast doubt on the claim of implicit communication and to provide support for the view that a Scanlonian account of blame still retains the explanatory power needed to explain cases that may intuitively seem better described by Smith’s account. A Scanlonian account can also better explain cases wherein one fails to seek acknowledgement despite blaming another. Allowing for this distinction between blame and communication has the additional benefit of being more true to everyday experiences of blame and the diversity of interests that one may have in communicating or in failing to communicate blame. In the following section of this chapter, I will consider Smith’s claim that apologies are uniquely appropriate responses to blame and will argue that, while I believe that there is a sense in which this is true, it does not support her view of blame.

One way that Smith supports her argument that blame always and implicitly seeking acknowledgement is in virtue of her claim that an apology, something that acknowledges and repudiates wrongdoing, is a uniquely appropriate response to blame. I agree that if either party seeks to address the wrongdoing, either because one wants to repair the relationship or for other
reasons, it does seem as though this will often require not just that the wrongdoer change for the better, but that there is an apology, acknowledgement and repudiation of the specific act of wrongdoing.\textsuperscript{144} I will also admit that it does seem odd to speak of cases where apologies would be an \textit{inappropriate} response to blame. I am sympathetic to the idea that apologies are uniquely appropriate responses to blame. It seems that even though a person changes for the better after some wrongdoing, should he leave the wrongdoing unaddressed, it may be difficult for the relationship to continue in a repaired and unimpaired state. Unlike Smith, however, I would want to emphasize that this interest in acknowledgement, whether or not it is expressed, remains contingent on the individual’s particular interests. Furthermore, even if the individual is interested in seeing the relationship repaired, he or she may not seek the sort of acknowledgement of wrongdoing that Smith wants to emphasize, namely an acknowledgement and repudiation of the false moral claim inherent in his or her attitude or action.\textsuperscript{145}

For example, there are cases where someone may blame another and wish for the relationship to be repaired but where neither an apology nor repudiation is sought, nor would be necessary for this repair. In fact, although it may be counter-intuitive, these forms of acknowledgement may sometimes be counter-productive in repairing a relationship. Imagine the following scenario involving someone I will call Peter. Peter may not be malicious, but, rather, demonstrates a lack of due care in his relationship. Peter’s partner blames him in response. Peter never acknowledges the fact that he has been less than caring in the past, but, rather, comes to understand what his partner needs of him and gradually becomes more attentive and caring. It

\textsuperscript{144} One can imagine a case where a person is greatly pained by being hurt by a stranger. Although one does not have much of a relationship with this person, beyond the sort of standing relationship in which one stands to fellow human beings, this relationship is impaired by the harm he has been caused. To receive a sincere apology may be to see the relationship as unimpaired. That being said, it may not be the continuing relationship itself that is as important to the wronged as the fact that something was resolved and acknowledged with the apology.

\textsuperscript{145} Smith, “Moral Blame and Moral Protest,” 46.
may be awkward for Peter to utter an apology just as it is for his partner to accept an apology, but his actions have sufficed for his partner coming to see the relationship as no longer impaired. It is not clear that Peter’s partner can or should be described as seeking repudiation or acknowledgement of Peter’s past actions. It is also not clear that Peter’s change in behaviour can be understood as an acknowledgement of his past wrongdoing.

Even if, as I have contended, apologies are not always required to repair a relationship, what of Smith’s claim that they are a “uniquely appropriate response” to justified blame? It may seem that if there is reason to endorse this claim, there is also reason to endorse Smith’s view of blame and to reject the Scanlonian view of blame, although I do not believe this to be necessary. Indeed, most, if not all, apologies will be an appropriate way to respond to blame, but it can also be asked whether this claim of appropriateness is sufficient to ground the assertion that blame is implicitly communicative. Whether or not blame is present, or whether or not the wrongdoer notices the wrongdoing, apologies often remain an appropriate response to wrongdoing. Though I reject Smith’s claim that blame implicitly seeks acknowledgement due to the fact that apologies are uniquely appropriate, agree that there is an important relationship between blame and acknowledgement. Often, relationships are only repaired when one party acknowledges and repudiates a wrong and tries to make amends. This response seems particularly appropriate when the one who blames also has a vested interest in the relationship being repaired. This repair often requires some sort of acknowledgement of past wrongdoing. It is also true that apologies are often an appropriate way of acknowledging that one committed a wrong that may have impaired a relationship. In most contexts, apologies are an appropriate response to both wrongdoing and blame, but there are sometimes cases that give one reason to withhold an apology, for example, if this act were cause further pain to the one who was wronged. Because of considerations
having to do with the wrongdoer’s interests, I am doubtful whether an apology can always be described as a uniquely appropriate response to wrongdoing. The fact that some individuals may deny an interest in hearing such apologies or further interacting with the wrongdoer may be enough to defeat Smith’s claim that the unique appropriateness of apologies supports the claim that blame implicitly seeks acknowledgement.

Furthermore, acknowledgement may not be sought after wrongdoing when it seems that the wrongdoer is unlikely to recognize his wrongs, given the state of his reasoning. In addition, it is often the case that one does not seek acknowledgment from someone if one is suspicious of the sincerity or meaning of an apology. An example is the common sentiment that arises in conjunction with apologies: “What would an apology mean coming from her?” There are other times when one may have little desire to interact with the wrongdoer or where one may find it painful or awkward, due to the nature of the relationship, to hear or accept an apology. The same sorts of considerations would seem to apply both to acknowledgement and repudiation that may come from the moral community at large, rather than from the wrongdoer himself.

In light of these varied interests, I would only endorse Smith’s claim that apologies are a uniquely appropriate way of responding to relational wrongs in a limited sense. If one recognizes that one has fallen short, it does seem right to acknowledge and repudiate this fact and often, to make some attempt at communicating this to the wronged party. But the claim that it is uniquely appropriate to acknowledge wrongdoing need not imply that all people who blame will have an interest in knowing whether a wrong has been acknowledged and repudiated. Without a doubt, it

146 This Facebook comment was made in response to an article in which the television host Joan Rivers claimed that her experience in her daughter’s cramped guest bedroom could be likened to the captivity experienced by the women who were held captive by Ariel Castro. “Ohio Women Held Captive Want Joan Rivers to Apologize,” CBS News, April 23, 2014, news story, https://www.facebook.com/CBSNews/posts/10152008493770950?stream_ref=10.
is true that many people will be interested in knowing that a wrong has been recognized, either to facilitate the repair of a relationship or for some other reason. Someone who blames a wrongdoer but has an insubstantial relationship with them may still have an interest in knowing that the wrongdoer both understands the harm that he has caused, and also, perhaps, that he recognizes moral reasons. Thus, it seems more plausible to claim that apologies to the wrongdoer are often appropriate but are not invariably appropriate, depending on the circumstances and the wrongdoer’s interests. By contrast, a wrongdoer’s recognition of moral reasons, whether or not it takes place in the form of an apology, is something that always remains appropriate in light of wrongdoing. It would never be inappropriate to recognize the considerations that give one reason to hold a particular attitude or to act in a certain way.

The interest that someone has in having another come to recognize moral reasons is more understandable in the context of an interpersonal relationship, especially one that he or she is interested in continuing. Why might the wronged individual have an interest, more generally, in having a wrongdoer recognize the wrong they have committed and to come to recognize moral reasons? I am less sure of how to explain such a phenomenon, but I do think that these interests are sometimes present. Wronged individuals often petition to have institutions apologize and acknowledge the wrongs brought against them, even decades after they have occurred. There may be relational benefits or psychological comfort that comes with someone acknowledging the role they played in one’s harm and in bringing about one’s pain. That being said, there also seems to be something intrinsically good about an individual’s recognizing value in the right way, be it moral value, artistic value or otherwise. Robert Adams’s work is helpful in articulating the variety of ways in which the recognition of wrongdoing can be valuable. He argues that repentance, associated acts of self-reproach, and the repudiation of wrongs are often important
for interpersonal reconciliation. He also warns that if one cannot recognize the role that one’s wrongdoing plays in the impairment of a relationship, it seems improbable that the relationship will be repaired. He claims that apart from the matter of reconciliation, a wrongdoer owes the wronged the recognition of his guilt. I am not sure about this latter claim, although I am more sympathetic to Adams’s other claim that it is right for us to recognize truths, moral or otherwise, whether or not this recognition is witnessed. He writes, “Whether or not reconciliation can be attained, indeed, and whether or not I can root out my bad attitude, I owe it to the other person to recognize my guilt for it in order to respond to the moral situation as it really is.”\(^\text{147}\)

I hope that the aforementioned discussion regarding the relationship between blame, apologies and seeking acknowledgement makes it clear that I am sympathetic both to the claim that it is appropriate and right to recognize moral reasons more generally, and also after the occurrence of wrongdoing. I also believe that this claim can and ought to be distinguished from the claim that blame implicitly seeks moral acknowledgement of wrongdoing. The recognition of moral reasons and the recognition of when one has fallen short are both good for their own sake and also something that can be important in helping to restore a relationship to a state of health in light of impairment. The appropriateness and value of this recognition and acknowledgement holds true whether or not a wrongdoer is blamed by the wronged or others. It is true that blame, especially when expressed, is often accompanied by an interest in having others, especially the wrongdoer, somehow respond to or acknowledge this claim. I contend that there are good reasons for claiming that this interest is not implicit in blame itself, but rather, dependent on

\(^{147}\) Adams, “Involuntary Sins,” 17, my emphasis. As I interpret Adams’s statement, this recognition may contribute to a further goal of fulfilling the interest in the wronged in having the wrongdoer recognize his or her wrongdoing and possibly, to reconciliation, but its value can also be described in terms that are not reliant on some further end. There is something valuable about an agent recognizing moral reasons and thus, the significance of his or her wrongdoing, full stop, whether or not it is witnessed or whether or contributes to reconciliation.
reasons having to do with an individual’s contingent interest in matters such as maintaining and restoring relationships, as mentioned above.

Likewise, I believe that it is always appropriate for those who witness wrongdoing to recognize a wrong as a wrong, or reality for what it is, whether or not one conveys this recognition to she who was wronged. There is no moral obligation to go about searching for as many wrongs as possible in order to identify them as such. Yet, were one to witness a wrong, such as a stranger being shoved into the street or were one to be told of some other wrong such as a friend being disrespected by his boss, it would, of course, be right for one to recognize and acknowledge the act as a blameworthy, at the very least. This seems to hold, whether or not one’s friend or the stranger on the street blame the wrongdoer. Defenders of the “implicit-seeking” view of blame, such as Smith, may not disagree with the characterization of the appropriateness of acknowledgement as stated above, but my view can be distinguished from theirs by noting that I deny that blame is what makes this acknowledgement appropriate. Acknowledgement in the sense of recognizing moral reasons will always be appropriate, whether or not it is sought. There are also cases when someone may blame, but it may be inappropriate to apologize if the other does not seek this sort of acknowledgement.

Furthermore, I think that it is important to recognize that there are a variety of ways to describe the relationship between blame and acknowledgement, even though it remains dependent on an individual’s particular interest. For example, some may blame others and also seek acknowledgement silently. Others may give voice to this blame as a way of directing the attention of others toward the significance of the wrongdoing, explicitly seeking their acknowledgment and recognition. Alternatively, it may be that due to matters of privacy or the pain of re-living old memories, an individual is better described as not seeking acknowledgement.
from others, at least not overtly, although she may not deny that it is appropriate for wrongdoer
to recognize their wrongs, whether or not this ever becomes known. Again, the appropriateness
of recognition seems neither particularly dependent on blame, nor, because of the sort of
examples mentioned, does it seem as though there is good reason for claiming that in all cases of
blame that this acknowledgement is implicitly sought.

iii) Communication and Expressions of Blame

    Thus far, I have considered and cast doubt upon the claim that blame is implicitly
communicative, or that it implicitly invites a response or acknowledgment from the person who
is blamed. I have maintained that there is good reason to question this construal of blame. Even
if this account of blame could be more readily defended, it is unclear that any implicit seeking of
acknowledgement or protesting could be deemed inappropriate because of poor formative
circumstances. In other words, I think there is good reason to reject this construal of blame, but
even if I agreed with it, I do not think that it would make blame obviously inappropriate in light
of poor formative circumstances since rational beings can still be held to rational demands. My
discussion will now turn from the relation between communication and blame to the relation
between communication and expressions of blame. My focus will be on discussing the grounds
for claiming that expressions of blame are communicative and what this description might have
to do, if anything, with the reasons one may have to modify blame in light of poor formative
circumstances. Given that I have denied it would be wrong to hold individuals to rational
expectations and moral demands, it may seem unlikely that I would claim that there is any reason
to alter expressions of blame. Indeed, I will argue that there are many cases in which there seem
to be good reasons to express and communicate blame, reasons that ought to be weighed against
others there may be to modify or to fail to express blame. In this section I will consider
expressions of blame in the way that I defined them earlier, i.e. in a narrow sense, as a conscious undertaking.

I will turn now to the matter of expressions of blame. A paradigmatic case usually involves confronting a wrongdoer and making it known that what she has done is wrong, that it will not be tolerated, that her wrongdoing changes the nature of the relationship, or some combination thereof. These expressions may occur either in the presence or in the absence of others. I would also want to acknowledge that expressions of blame, even if they involve a conscious expression, may vary greatly. The expressions of blame that most interest me are those that are primarily undertaken to point the wrongdoer’s attention towards the wrongdoing, recognizing that this by no means exhausts all the possible meanings of “expressions of blame.”

There may be normative considerations to consider as they pertain to other expressions, both those that do not directly involve the wrongdoer and those that involve the wrongdoer, but do not have to do with drawing attention to the wrong, but rather, to inflicting suffering or punishment. My focus will be on those expressions of blame that attempt to get the wrongdoer to recognize and acknowledge wrongdoing.

In order to consider and discuss the communicative aspect of expressions of blame, I will once again turn to the philosophical literature to give some sense of how these expressions might be manifest. Those who maintain a non-volitional conception of moral responsibility often think that there are normative considerations to be considered when deciding whether to express blame even when blame itself remains appropriate. As noted earlier, Adams discusses the conditions that make reproach appropriate or inappropriate, despite the appropriateness of blame. The conditions he cites are not clearly related to an agent’s past circumstances or the difficulty that a person may have in recognizing moral reasons. The conditions have more to do with matters that
are often classified as having to do with one’s “standing to blame”, though they are not explicitly described as such. The distinction between one’s standing to blame and as I am calling it, standing to *express* blame, are distinct on his account. There are times when one may have standing to blame but not have standing to express reproach given other considerations such as considerations having to do with the importance of respecting a wrongdoer’s privacy. Hieronymi also recognizes that although the target charge of unfairness does not apply to the judgments constitutive of blame, certain intentional actions that express blame could be considered unfair. She argues that there are rational considerations that govern when one ought to refrain from certain sorts of expressions. She allows for background considerations associated with someone’s recognition of moral reasons to have some appropriate role to play in making these sorts of decisions. Likewise, Scanlon maintains that there are various considerations that are appropriate to contemplate when reasoning about whether and how to express blame, even if they are not relevant to blame itself. These considerations include the consequences for the agent who is blamed. Scanlon, like Hieronymi, thinks that considerations about someone’s past, assumedly including poor formative circumstances, may make some reasonable difference to how a blameworthy person ought to be treated and how blame ought to be expressed.

The considerations that count against expressions of blame as described by the aforementioned, fall into what could be considered to be two main classes. The first is composed of considerations that would make certain expressions of blame cruel, vindictive or unfair. Given that there is always reason to avoid being cruel, vindictive or unfair, if expressing blame to certain persons make it the case that one would be acting in this way, it is a decisive reason to refrain. Alternatively, there are considerations that seem to be less decisive in nature, such as

reasons of compassion that prohibit expressing blame in certain ways. This is not to say that these categories are necessarily clear, but it does seem clear that these categories are not merely the reverse of each other. For example, a failure to be cruel does not necessarily mean that one is being compassionate and a failure to show mercy does not necessarily mean that one is being unfair. One’s failure to show cruelty just means that one is not being cruel. One’s failure to show kindness or compassion means that one is failing to be kind or compassionate, perhaps apathetic or unaware of others’ needs, but not cruel or callous. These categories are of course less than firmly bounded, but it is clear to me that they do not represent clear opposites. Though my main interest is in the tension between reasons to limit expressions of blame and the value of blame as a form of communication, it would be a mistake, as I have noted above, to portray “expressions of blame” as a homogeneous class. There may be decisive reasons to refrain from certain sorts or modes of expression and less decisive reasons to refrain from others. Expressions of blame in this narrow sense may include the making of demands, asking for acknowledgement, criticism or reproach, among others.

Reproach is sometimes taken to be either synonymous with expressing blame or describing the critical, disapproving aspect of expressions of blame. All expressions of blame have some element of criticism insofar as they recognize how wrongdoing has impaired a relationship, but this criticism varies in its nature and explicitness. For example, imagine that someone reveals that she has lied to you. If you get up from the table and walk away, that may be understood as an expression of blame, and perhaps as a sign of reproach.\(^\text{149}\) Nonetheless, it seems that the paradigmatic case of reproach, based on the way the word is typically used, would involve confronting her with something like the following questions: “Why did you lie to me? I

\(^{149}\) It may be that in this case one is nonetheless not expressing blame in the narrow sense in which I am concerned i.e. to convey blame. One may simply be motivated to exit and avoid the situation.
can’t believe you did that! This changes everything!” or something similar. Though I think it is helpful to attempt to clarify how the word is being used, that, of course, does not mean that reproach need be made explicit with the words “I blame you.” Reproach can be expressed in a ways that are more subtle. For example, it is not uncommon to hear of people referring to a look of reproach or to being reproached through non-engagement such as silence. It is also not nonsensical to speak of silent reproach, though it seems to me that this would not be a paradigmatic case.

To return to my main interest at hand: what it is about poor formative circumstances that may give reason for thinking that blame ought to be expressed differently or modified? I will first consider the sorts of reasons associated with not being cruel, vindictive and the like. Certain circumstances can help to explain why some situations ought to be considered cruel because of facts about the agent. For example, it would not normally be considered cruel to demand that a child complete his assignment if you are a teacher, but if the child lacks the skills needed to complete it, then it will seem both cruel and likely unfair to demand completion. If the student has the requisite skills, in some form, this same demand will not be cruel or unfair. Facts about the agent influence whether the act should be considered to be cruel. This case seems clear, but although the teacher’s demand to complete the assignment may be cruel in the absence of certain skills, it is not the case that all demands made of the student should be considered cruel. For example, consider another case where a teacher asks that a student explain why he answered a question in a particular way and then goes on to help him reason more clearly if his logic was mistaken. This would not seem to be obviously cruel. Though the analogy draws on similarities that may be found in the case of expressing demands in the case of wrongdoing, there are also differences. For example, as I have noted, many cases of blame involve situations where one not
only thinks that there is reason to demand that someone treat us in certain ways. It is often the
case that one thinks that an adult ought to have gained the kind of moral proficiency needed to
recognize moral reasons, regardless of past circumstance. In other words, in the case of blame,
one is not just demanding that someone try again, perhaps with our help, but one is also often
claiming that he ought to have gotten it right in the first place.

What might it be about expressions of reproach that are particularly problematic in cases
where the subject of the expression has suffered from poor formative circumstances? One answer
may be that there is nothing particularly unique about reproaching someone who has suffered
from poor formative circumstances, but that the reproach itself is cruel or unfair. This response
seems unlikely to me, given the stringency of prohibitions against cruelty or unfairness and my
understanding of reproach as an expression of critical disapproval. The alternative is that facts
about the agent make certain expressions of blame, such as reproach, cruel or unfair in a way that
it would not otherwise be so considered. Imagine that someone commits a wrong within the
context of a momentary lapse. Perhaps this person was in a new relationship, got caught up in his
new romance and neglected all other relationships wrongly. His actions were wrong, but his
explanation likely helps temper the significance. Upon being confronted with the fact that he has
wrongly ignored the others in his life, he gives this explanation and apologizes, vowing to do
better next time. If another person is confronted in the same way, but is unable to recognize why
he is blameworthy because of his past circumstances, he arguably experiences unique burdens
associated with being unable to understand the significance of these demands and with knowing
that he is unable to meet those same demands. It also seems that making such demands will be pointless if they do not contribute to the agent’s coming to understand the nature of his wrong.150

Speaking to this concern, Scanlon remarks on the cruelty of berating someone and appears to accept that it may be cruel to berate someone for faults that he cannot help having. He notes that this is particularly so if the person cannot see the moral objections to what he has done. It is important to note that these would seem to be two separate categories based on Scanlon’s analysis.151 First, there are those “who have faults that they cannot help having,” but assumedly not all of those in this category will fail in recognizing the moral objections to what he has done. In other words, if someone is horribly weak willed due in large part to past poor circumstances, he may still be able to recognize the objections to what he has done while continuing to be weak willed. I have some confusion over Scanlon’s first category of “faults he cannot help having.” One way of thinking of this category is as referring to faults that were acquired in large part due circumstances outside of one’s control. Another option is that this category makes reference to the fact that certain faults may be recalcitrant due to factors largely outside one’s control. Imagining that there were some faults that were recalcitrant to all reasoning and change, in principle, then perhaps it would be cruel to confront such a person by expressing blame, but this also makes me wonder whether one could be said to be standing in a moral relationship with such a person. Should one have rational expectations of such a person or consider a relationship impaired if it is in principle impossible for such a person to stand in a relationship, unimpaired with fellow rational beings? I am not primarily interested in such beings, were they to exist. For the time being I will assume that Scanlon’s discussion concerns

150 That being said, even if certain sorts of demands may be cruel, this need not imply that the wrongdoer will have any more of a claim than others not to be confronted about their wrongdoings or to face demands for explanations or better treatment. Scanlon also makes this claim in Scanlon, Moral Dimensions, footnote 54.
151 I understand berating to be a kind of angry confrontation or scolding.
those who have certain faults that come about primarily due to factors other than one’s own prejudices or preceding mistakes, though he who possesses these faults is still a rational being who could, in principle, recognize moral reasons.

Hearkening back to my analysis of Smith’s earlier case of the racists, Abigail and Bert in Chapter 3, I did admit that in confronting these wrongdoers, I would confront Bert differently than Abigail. I said that I would confront him with more confusion and questioning, but I would maintain that angry indignation, if it is an appropriate response to wrongdoing, is no less appropriate in the case of Abigail than of Bert. Both “should have known better,” but with Bert, there is the additional recognition or sense that he would have had an even easier time coming to recognize moral truths than Abigail given the difficulty that she may have in ridding herself of irrational prejudice. Given that Scanlon seems to see nothing wrong with citing wrongdoing and explaining why one has blamed another, despite past circumstance, the claim seems to be that the suffering that one might experience from being berated is cruel when it extends beyond what could be expected from modifying one’s attitudes or from explaining to someone the nature of their wrongdoing. If berating seeks to inflict suffering or pain in addition to that caused by the aforementioned, then it is not immediately clear to me why the charge of cruelty would be dependent on whether one suffered poor formative circumstances.

If cruelty involves the wilful causing of pain and suffering and if berating is one way that this may take place, then it is less than clear why the prohibition against inflicting this pain and suffering would be dependent on facts about the agent. To be sure, there are decisive reasons not to be cruel that hold regardless of the genealogical story of how one came to commit the wrong. I do recognize that there may be unique sorts of suffering that come with being treated cruelly when it is more difficult for one to overcome one’s faults, but this suffering would seem to be
similar to the suffering of others who find themselves unable to change their entrenched irrationalities. Perhaps Scanlon’s idea of “faults that one cannot help but having” could be understood in this sense, but I am not sure whether Scanlon would accept “particularly entrenched irrationalities” for “faults that they cannot help having.”

So, cruelty is wrong regardless of who is the target and seeking to cause harm, beyond what is involved in blame, other things being equal, would also be wrong. Being faced with a rational demand that one is unable to meet need not be considered cruel, though one may experience pain at recognizing this fact. Demanding individuals recognize moral reasons and their wrongdoing seems like a flawed enterprise, regardless of how they came to act wrongly, unless they have the means, in principle, of coming to recognize their wrong. In some cases, this task may involve providing more information, along with the demands, or may involve drawing one’s attention to salient considerations that one may not have noticed or been able to interpret. The former may in some cases be cruel if it only frustrates the wrongdoer who may be in a state wherein he still cannot recognize the significance of what he has done. Alternatively, some expressions of blame many initially frustrate but can also play other important roles such as helping someone come to recognize moral reasons. Since one has no claim to not being confronted with this information or with these arguments, being the target of expressions of blame is not clearly unfair without further argumentation. The reality of being confronted by one’s wrongdoing and its significance may bring pain, but not all acts that bring foreseen pain are necessarily cruel. Hearing someone’s sober opinion of one’s work or being confronted with the dangers associated with a particular, necessary course of action are both cases in which one

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152 This is not to say that any actions or expressions that ultimately aid someone in recognizing moral reasons are permissible. For example, it may be that coercing someone into attending moral philosophy classes will better help them to recognize moral reasons, but this would still be impermissible.
may feel pained, but making this information known should not be considered cruel. It would indeed seem repugnant to conclude that all difficult interactions between wrongdoer and wronged are somehow cruel if they result in some degree of pain. Indeed, there are certain valuable outcomes that seem only to be made possible by voicing the recognition that one has been wronged and asking for an explanation. Although consequences alone do not provide sufficient grounds for an action’s permissibility, as I have noted earlier, it is not obvious that there is a corresponding right not to be confronted by the fact or significance of one’s actions, to be made subject to expressed rational demands, or to entreaties to explain one’s actions.

Although I would stop short of claiming that it is unfair or cruel to express blame to someone who has difficulty recognizing moral reasons, I would agree that there is a certain unique frustration that comes with being unable to give an adequate reply or answer to another’s demands, as mentioned earlier. In the second chapter, I discussed the case of Unfortunate Ulrich; Ulrich is not convinced that he has reason to fully reject the claims of others, but does not fully recognize their significance or and is unable to adequately respond. This unique suffering may occur in any case where someone is unable to meet certain demands or provide certain adequate explanations, regardless of the origin of these inabilities. There may be cases where someone had more of a hand in seeking out ways to affirm his prejudice compared to someone who develops prejudice in large part due to suffering poor, formative circumstances. The recognition that one has suffered from poor formative influences may make the fact that one is unable to meet certain demands no less painful than if one is unable to meet them due to other influences. That being said, there could be what amounts to a sort of pain felt at what seems like the global unfairness of suffering poor consequences associated with failing to recognize moral reasons. Knowledge of how one’s failure to adequately recognize moral reasons came to be
would not seem to be a fact that would give an individual less reason to express blame to another, but as I have noted earlier, it may provide certain grounds for aiding this person more than other wrongdoers, other things being equal.

The unique sort of frustrations that may arise from an entrenched difficulty in recognizing moral reasons, rather than the origin of this difficulty, is what seems to be most relevant in understanding the suffering that may arise from expressions of blame. Having no good “story” to tell, or not being able to grasp the kind of response that is due in response to expressions of blame can be considered to be a unique burden that it may be unkind to persist in perpetuating, at least in the form of expressed blame.\footnote{153} If the demand itself does little or nothing to aid the agent in recognizing moral reasons, then it may indeed be unkind to persist in demanding certain responses that the agent will likely be unable to provide in their current state. In considering the appropriateness of expressing blame, it is someone’s difficulty in responding to expressions of blame that seems to be doing the work here, not the origins of that difficulty.

If expressing blame is sometimes fraught with these ethical concerns, some may suggest that expressions of blame should be avoided. After all, what good does an expression of blame serve as long as she who has been wronged already recognized the significance of the wrong? Its only purpose would seem to be to be to draw the attention either the wrongdoer or others, to the wrong. It is widely accepted that expressions of blame play this role.\footnote{154} Although expressions of blame may serve valuable purposes when expressed to those other than the wrongdoer, my main interest is in the value of expressions of blame that are directed from the wronged towards the

\footnote{153} As noted in earlier chapters, there are certain pains or burdens that may persist simply from the agent’s own reasoning, such as the recognition that one has fallen short, while failing to adequately appreciate moral reasons and respond appropriately to wrongdoing.

wrongdoer. For example, if a friend wrongs you, and you express blame to a third mutual friend, this may serve the role of affirming one’s own recognition of certain values and of gaining affirmation from one’s friend of these values as a kind of sign of solidarity. It may also be that one wants to convey to the mutual friend that one will not tolerate certain sorts of behaviour. My discussion is primarily concerned with the good reasons that one may have for expressing blame to a wrongdoer specifically.

I have chosen to discuss what I believe to be two common interests motivating the expression of blame to a wrongdoer. The first is an interest in having the wrong addressed explicitly by the wrongdoer. This interest is often, but not always, contingent upon the interest that one may have in the relationship to being repaired to a state wherein it is no longer impaired. The second is an interest that one may have in the wrongdoer’s recognizing moral reasons more generally, for their own sake, and perhaps also to help repair a particular relationship. One could imagine, for example, someone confronting another who has harmed them, trying to get this person understand the significance of what they have done, perhaps pointing to the detrimental effects and articulating the rights that one has not to be treated in certain ways. Imagine the case involved a person being taunted because of her political views. She may confront the person who taunts her, both asserting her rights while attempting to engage the person in a conversation about rights and wrongdoing, recognizing that it would be better if this person does not taunt her or others, but only aiming indirectly, if at all, at having the relationship repaired. Her main aim may be to aid him in coming to recognize the treatment that

155 Matthew Talbert, inspired by Bernard Boxill, speaks to the value of this recognition of moral facts in the context of wrongdoing, even if it is unlikely that the wrongdoer will ever recognize these facts himself. Matthew Talbert, “Moral Competence, Moral Blame and Protest,” The Journal of Ethics 16, no. 1 (2012), 106.

156 As noted earlier, I am not claiming that in order for all relationships to be restored to a healthy, unimpaired state, blame needs to be overtly expressed in order to elicit an explicit response.
he owes others, in part to prevent future rights violations. This broader interest in having someone recognize the significance of his wrongdoing either for the person’s own sake or for the wrongdoer’s sake, but also for the sake of the relationship, is a significant and important interest motivating expressions of blame. I will focus on whether there are ways to fulfill these interests by expressing blame without being cruel or unfair to those who may suffer the effects of poor formative circumstances. I will also consider whether and how such circumstances might provide grounds for acting charitably or mercifully when expressing blame. I will now turn to discussing the idea of mercy and the extent to which it makes sense to refer to mercy in an interpersonal context as compared to a legal context. I will draw upon John Tasioulas’ account of mercy understood in light of his discussion of a communicative theory of punishment. Given that there are some difficulties with invoking mercy in an interpersonal context, I will subsequently consider whether there are, if any, good reasons to show compassion in expressing blame to those who have suffered poor formative circumstances. I will argue that there are indeed reasons to show compassion in expressing blame in particular circumstances, but that this need not entail the prohibition of all expressions of blame in these cases. Indeed, there are often countervailing reasons to express blame in some form when an agent has difficulty in recognizing moral reasons.

III. Mercy, Compassion, and Recognizing the Hardship of Poor Formative Circumstances

i) Mercy in the Interpersonal Context

The term “mercy” is often used in the context of the legal system and its judgments and sentencing. In this vein, John Tasioulas describes mercy as involving the tempering of punishment that is rendered appropriate by the procedures of justice. He also considers what
mercy is not: it is not attentiveness to the details of individual cases since equity, an aspect of
justice, requires attentiveness as to what would be a just application of rules given the details of a
particular case.\textsuperscript{157} He also argues that mercy ought to be considered distinct from leniency as a
more general concept; the leniency involved in mercy is of a specific sort and requires sensitivity
to certain considerations since mercy involves leniency shown only for particular sorts of
reasons.\textsuperscript{158} Mercy, in the same manner as forgiveness, is something that is not thought to be
owed to others or something that can be demanded, but it would be mistaken to assume that this
implies the absence of rational grounds for showing mercy. There may, indeed, be reasons to
show generosity or compassion toward someone without it being obligatory when these rational
considerations are present. For example, it may be that my relationship with a close friend gives
me reason to show generosity in lending her something of worth, although she may have failed
to show due care in the past. This does not mean that such a person can demand that I lend things
to her, but it may still be rational to do so given the fact that I want to maintain our relationship,
perhaps in part by showing that I am willing to entrust things to her care and to give her a chance
to demonstrate her trustworthiness.

Tasioulas emphasizes that mercy must involve “a concern with the wrongdoer’s
predicament as someone who is liable to punishment” rather than, for example, a desire to
demonstrate one’s power, as may sometimes be the case when officials or political figures show
leniency in exacting a punishment.\textsuperscript{159} Although Tasioulas mainly focuses on the discussion of
mercy within the legal realm, his discussion of the communicative aspects of punishment can be

\textsuperscript{158} Tasioulas, “Mercy,” 102.
\textsuperscript{159} Tasioulas, “Mercy,” 103. Jeffrie Murphy conceives of mercy similarly. He writes: “It strikes me as analytic that
mercy is based on a compassionate concern for the defendant’s plight . . .” Jean Hampton and Jeffrie G. Murphy,
brought to bear upon interpersonal cases wherein blame is expressed as a form of communication. I have not discussed the idea of punishment at any length, but one ought to take caution not to describe too many things as forms of punishment. For example, a teacher who explains to a student that her work is sub-par and would not allow her admission to a desirable university is sharing information that the student may find difficult to bear, but she is not seeking to inflict a burden of the sort that comes with violating certain just rules as may be the case if she suspends the student for violating the prohibition against cheating.

One way of conceiving of justified mercy is as responding to the rational considerations that may make it the case that certain punishments constitute “excessive hardship.” For example, Tasioulas cites the case of someone who loses his family as a result of his crime of negligence and is deeply remorseful as a result. Drawing on a communicative theory of punishment that understands one of the goals of punishment to be the communication of censure, he argues that the strict application of this punishment would “force him to attend to his wrongdoing,” which he is already doing. He claims that although the punishment may still be justified, the full sentence may cause excessive hardship and may be cruel given that the point of punishment is to communicate this censure. Tasioulas considers this case to provide grounds for mercy. Though I do not disagree that great suffering ought to be diminished when possible, other things being equal, I do wonder whether a sentence with cruel outcomes could be considered to be a deserved, just punishment. It seems as though justice is incompatible with inflicting perhaps not a sentence that would impose suffering, but that it is incompatible with inflicting a cruel outcome. If justice itself precludes sentencing that results in cruel suffering, whether because the person already understands his wrong or for some other reason, then this seems to leave less of a

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role for mercy. Since neither my main interest nor my specialization is in the area of legal justice, I will consider how the idea of legal justice and especially how Tasioulas’ articulation of communicative punishment and excessive hardship may help to explain the reasons there may be to modify expressions of blame, even though these reasons are not best understood in terms of the legal conception of mercy.

As noted earlier, there are various disanalogies in the case of legal mercy and mercy in the interpersonal case. There is no clear sense of deserved punishment according to just rules in the case of interpersonal relationships, and my interest is not in interpersonal punishment anyway. Rather, I am interested in when or whether there are grounds to modify morally justifiable expressions of blame. The role of expressions of blame in humiliating others or in causing gratuitous suffering is likely never defensible, so I will not address those sorts of aims. I, like many of those I have referenced, see expressions of blame as having a potentially important role in conveying one’s condemnation of certain treatment to the wrongdoer as a way of drawing his attention to the wrongdoing. Why might one want draw the wrongdoer’s attention to the wrong? In many cases, it will be because a response of some sort is desired from the wrongdoer, for example, an apology or an explanation of some sort. Sometimes this may be readily received and other times, this is never received, or received, but only sometime later.

Although expressions of blame are often used as a way to seek a response to some wrongdoing, one can imagine a case where someone shouts at his assailant “How could you?” and in so doing, expresses blame without really expecting some ongoing dialogue or response.

161 Murphy puts it like this, though I may not conceive of responsibility in the same way as he does: “For to avoid inflicting upon persons more suffering than they deserve, or to avoid punishing the less responsible, is a simple – indeed obvious – demand of justice.” Murphy, 171. Inflicting punishment beyond what would be required to communicate censure could be understood as cruel on Tasioulas’ account, but Tasioulas seems to favour the view that mercy could fix the deserved, and assumedly just, punishment.
Although not all expressions of blame may consciously aim at having the wrongdoer come to recognize the significance of his wrong, I will focus on this aim. This seems to be not only a morally acceptable, but also, a morally valuable use of expressions of blame. The reasons there are to express blame in order to draw the wrongdoer’s attention to the significance of his wrongdoing for his relations with others more generally and sometimes to the significance for a particular relationship. These are the kinds of facts and realities that I believe Adams is referencing when he refers to drawing someone’s attention to the “moral facts” in and to acknowledge “moral realities.” Drawing upon these references, I will refer to the reasons to express blame that are rooted in the project of drawing someone’s attention to these realities as Moral Reality reasons. I am curious whether it can be defended that poor formative circumstances provide reasons to modify or fail to express blame in ways that would compete with or outweigh these Moral Reality reasons. This broader investigation will require saying something about how expressions of blame might participate in this process of bringing someone to recognize the moral reality of his wrongdoing. I will then address countervailing reasons for not expressing blame, even blame that has this aim of having someone recognize the significance of his wrongdoing. I will consider whether poor circumstances play any independent role in grounding these reasons. Lastly, I will defend the view that there are often good reasons to modify expressions of blame for reasons of compassion when someone has particular difficulty in recognizing moral reasons, whether these be due to poor formative circumstances or otherwise.

Expressions of blame can sometimes play the role of drawing someone’s attention toward the significance of what he has done, usually not only by saying “what you did was wrong,” but also by providing some explanation of this claim. For example, consider the case of someone
who is an opportunist and capitalizes on the vulnerabilities of others. Imagine she is a competitive co-worker who assigns others with tasks and projects when she knows they are overburdened and unable to complete them in order to demonstrate what their supposed incompetence and her supposed superiority, in comparison. One might say to such a person “You’re asking me now?” In this case, she knows exactly what she is doing, and so likely would not be moved to rethink her actions in virtue of this expression of blame. One may also say something more: “It’s unfair of you to ask me to do this when I’m already overburdened, especially because of how you know it will make me appear to others.” This may give her further reasons to reflect on why what she’s doing is unreasonable and constitutes unfair treatment. Although she may be aware of this fact, it may cause her to reflect further on the moral unacceptability of using someone else as a means to further her success. It is, of course, possible for expressions of blame to be more subtle. One may adjust one’s intention to work collaboratively with this colleague, as a part of the modifications constitutive of blame, rather than as an expression of blame. Still, one may hope that this colleague notices this adjustment and understands it as a sort of form of communication as well.

As I have noted in other chapters, it is not entirely clear what sorts of responses will help someone recognize moral reasons, but without espousing a particular theory of moral education, I think it is helpful to seriously consider Adams’s idea of aiding someone in coming to recognize the moral realities. Certainly, many come to recognize the significance of their wrongdoing without having been expressly blamed, so expressions of blame are not necessary for attaining this recognition. Furthermore, an expression of blame is not sufficient for bringing about recognition of the significance of the wrongdoing since an agent himself must reflect upon this expression in order to potentially alter his other attitudes and beliefs. Despite my failure to
provide a thoroughgoing account of how this process takes place, I believe that there are grounds for supposing that this expression can sometimes contribute to a wrongdoer’s reflection and re-examination of his wrongdoing.

**ii) Reasons Not To Express Blame**

Although I do believe that there are Moral Reality-type reasons, reasons to express blame in order draw attention to moral realities, one ought to weigh these against reasons for failing to express blame or reasons to be cautious when expressing blame. I will take for granted that the cases I am discussing are cases where one is justified in blaming and has standing to blame, though there may still be reasons to withhold expressions of blame in these cases. There are a variety of reasons why one should withhold expressions of blame, whether or not one has been negatively influenced by one’s past circumstances. It is helpful to take stock of a few of these sorts of reasons before trying to make sense of the independent role that poor formative circumstance may or may not have in determining reasons to withhold expressions of blame. These sorts of reasons include general reasons not to bring about unnecessary suffering or cruel outcomes, reasons not to significantly damage one’s relationship by expressing blame to the wrongdoer or to respect normative considerations such as the consideration of someone’s privacy.

As a starting point in thinking about these sorts of reasons, it is helpful to revisit Scanlon’s distinction between berating someone for certain faults and explaining why one can no longer trust that individual. It is arguably difficult for a wrongdoer to be subject to both an angry scolding for one’s faults as well as an explanation of why he cannot be trusted. The word “berating” has connotations of not only scolding, but of treating someone with disdain and perhaps with a continuous and unrelenting degree of critical condemnation. As mentioned
earlier, there is always reason to refrain from treating someone cruelly, but what amounts to cruel treatment may sometimes depend on facts about the agent and the situation. Hieronymi describes the inappropriateness of certain expressions of blame as depending upon how or whether the agent can answer and respond to certain demands. She writes: “Issuing a demand, for example, may be inappropriate if the person in question is unable to meet the demand, or if the person in question is incapable of understanding it and responding to it. Issuing a demand to someone unable to meet it seems not only pointless but also unfair.”\(^{162}\) Though I agree, it is also important to once again note the ambiguity of the term ‘incapable’ if it is not further explained. It is quite plausible to think that the demands made of a wrongdoer may encourage her to think about the kind of appropriate response required, and may be part of the process of reflection that allows her to respond to this demand, though she was initially unable to adequately respond. That being said, if one recognizes the ongoing difficulty that someone has in responding to this demand, there may be reason to avoid demanding a response that cannot be received, at least in someone’s current state.\(^{163}\) In other words, requiring that someone do something that they are currently unable to do may constitute a form of undue suffering or cruelty that there is reason to avoid, though it is not always clear when someone is unable to adequately respond to expressions of blame.

Another set of reasons to refrain from expressing blame have to do with the effect that expressions of blame have on one’s relationship with another. Expressions may sometimes damage one’s relationship with the wrongdoer or violate other norms.\(^{164}\) For example, imagine

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\(^{162}\) Hieronymi, “The Force and Fairness of Blame,” 118.

\(^{163}\) It is true that it may not always be easy, empirically, to know when one’s demands are, given the person’s current state of reasoning, pointless.

\(^{164}\) Adams’s focus on considerations of privacy in deciding whether to reproach is more concerned with the distinction between blaming actions versus state of mind, but I think he is right to point to this consideration, more generally. Adams, “Involuntary Sins,” 23.
that I found out that my business partner has been going broke and is asking to borrow money from family members who cannot afford to help him. I may think that his inability to call it quits, rather than burdening his family, shows poor judgment. I may adjust my attitudes and blame him for this blameworthy act, but it may cause him great shame if I explicitly express my blame to him. He may even realize by the fact that I am trying to sever ties with him that I blame him for his poor judgment, but it may be a great indignity for me to express this blame in more explicit terms.

As was mentioned earlier in discussing Adams and Tasioulas, expressions of blame may also cause undue suffering insofar as they seek to point the attention of the wrongdoer towards his wrong when this has already occurred. It may cause excessive suffering to express blame to someone for wrongdoing for which they are already blaming themselves. If someone acts impulsively and shoots a loved one, he may immediately regret it and understand the nature of the wrong. To continually express blame may become cruel in excess of what is needed to communicate one’s recognition of the wrongdoing and what is needed to draw the wrongdoer’s attention to the significance of the wrongdoing. These are just a few of the sorts of considerations that may ground reasons not to express blame. Insofar as these reasons are reasons to refrain from causing undue suffering, they could be considered reasons of compassion since as I noted earlier, I have doubts about the applicability of mercy in the interpersonal realm.

### iii) Modified Expressions of Blame and the Facilitation of Recognizing Moral Reasons

I will now transition to considering whether there are good reasons for expressing blame in a way that is compassionate in towards the hardship of those cited in the UV argument and how these reasons might be balanced against Moral Reality reasons. I also want to consider more tangibly how the balancing of these reasons might manifest in one’s treatment of a wrongdoer by employing a literary example from Victor Hugo’s, *Les Misérables*. One of my ongoing questions
and concerns, given the larger project, is whether something like a compassionate response to hardship and suffering is compatible with expressing blame given Moral Reality reasons.

Returning to the heart of the problem that has been with me from the beginning of the project, I want to consider how one can recognize that those negatively influenced by poor formative circumstances often suffer hardships without denying responsibility, the justifiability of blame and without hindering the worthy, though not obligatory, goal of aiding someone in recognizing moral reasons. There is sometimes confusion over how one could respond compassionately while still blaming or, as has been discussed, whether it is unfair simply to consider such a person responsible. I have wanted to discuss cases where I maintain that blame is still appropriate, while also considering how poor formative circumstances may provide grounds to express blame differently without having to sacrifice the opportunity to aid someone in this process of recognizing their wrongs. My main interest in the hardship of those who have suffered poor formative circumstances is in the hardship suffered as a result of failing to recognize moral reasons and all its attendant consequences.

Poor formative circumstances are not necessarily unique in making it difficult to recognize moral reasons, for example, weakness of will or other irrationalities may make it particularly difficult. Since my main concern is with this difficulty in recognition, the discussion of how to appropriately express blame given this hardship, and given Moral Reality reasons will be relevant to a variety of circumstances. It will be helpful to consider a specific scenario in imagining how one might convey blame in a way that does not pose undue hardship, while treating the individual as a responsible agent and while attempting to facilitate the recognition of moral reasons. One promising avenue of inquiry is to think about the kinds of actions and attitudes that may be needed in order to help an agent to better recognize moral reasons in light
of his or her wrongdoing. For example, an expression of blame wherein one explains why one has adjusted certain attitudes and intentions towards the wrongdoer may play some role in aiding the agent in recognizing moral reasons, but there are other responses that may have more of a role to play. These responses will not necessarily be expressions of blame per se, but neither are they incompatible with expressions of blame more generally. It will be helpful to once again consider an example in order to assess what it might mean to show a merciful or compassionate response to a wrongdoer that is not incompatible with expressing blame. Though the example is often cited, I will draw from the case of the Bishop’s response to Jean Valjean’s stealing silver, a familiar scene from *Les Misérables*.

I believe that the example is useful because it shows how one might help facilitate another’s recognition of moral realities or moral reasons in a way that would be compatible with certain expressions of blame; perhaps even condemnation. In the example, the Bishop recognizes that Valjean has done wrong; this is implicit in his response to Valjean, as I will discuss later. I also believe that his response is a good example of how a response may provide grounds for enabling a wrongdoer to better respond to blame, and to recognize moral reasons more generally. The example proceeds as follows: Jean Valjean has finally been released from the galleys after having suffered great punishment as a result of stealing a loaf of bread. Hugo describes Valjean’s experience with society as one that been marked by injury and wrath and as a result, he is filled with hate towards others. He enters the home of the sleeping Bishop and while the house is

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165 I would not want to deny that such expressions could have a role to play in helping others to recognize moral reasons, but they may not always provide enough basis for someone who has difficulty with moral reasoning or is caught in one might call a “rut of moral reasoning” where someone’s explanation for why they are blaming you is simply an explanation on the basis of standards that one does not appreciate or accept.

166 “And then human society had done him nothing but injury; never had he seen anything of her, but this wrathful face which she calls justice, and which she shows to those whom she strikes down. No man had touched him but to bruise him. All his contact with men had been by blows. Never, since his infancy, since his mother, since his sister, never had he been greeted with a friendly word or a kind regard. Through suffering on suffering he came little by
sleeping, he steals the silverware. Upon leaving and after having been apprehended by the authorities, he is returned to the home of the Bishop in order to return the silver, as it had been presumed stolen. The Bishop responds in two ways to Valjean’s plight: although the silver had indeed been stolen, he denies this to the authorities, and goes so far as to offer Valjean the silver candlesticks that he left behind. He also addresses Valjean apart from the authorities, addressing him with the following words: “Forget not, never forget that you have promised me to use this silver to become an honest man.”

The Bishop addresses Valjean as “brother” and though he speaks of purchasing his soul from evil through his compassionate response. The religious language of his full response to Valjean admittedly adds complexity to the example, but I believe that the gesture can nonetheless be used to shed light upon the way in which a compassionate response, whether or not it is religiously motivated, may contribute to the recognition of moral reasons yet not deny the appropriateness of blame. I believe that the important part of the example is that the Bishop’s response demonstrates how one may recognize someone’s wrongdoing, while also expressing what might be characterized as a mix of confidence and hope that the wrongdoer’s future need not be characterized solely by his past wrongdoing. The Bishop expresses deliberately to Valjean his belief that Valjean has the capacity to recognize his wrongs and to recognize the demands of morality.

The example is of course complicated by the fact that the legal and interpersonal realms have become intertwined and the threat of punishment is one that originates from a legal

Little to the conviction that life was a war; and that in that war he was the vanquished. He had no weapon but his hate.” Hugo, Les Misérables, 65.

167 Ibid., 66.

168 “Jean Valjean, my brother: you belong no longer to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying for you. I withdraw it from dark thoughts and from the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God!” Hugo, Les Misérables, 66. In this context, The Bishop would also assumedly claim that Valjean would need or benefit from spiritual intervention in recognizing moral reasons. I believe that the example can be useful in understanding more general sort of compassionate response; whether or not the particular respondent believes that the understanding of moral reasons requires or benefits from divine intervention.
authority. The Bishop doesn’t deny that what Valjean has done is wrong, at least once he is out
of earshot of the authorities. He claims that Valjean should “use this silver to become an honest
man” and claims that Valjean no longer belongs to evil but rather, to good. These expressions all
speak to the Bishop’s recognition of Valjean’s wrongdoing. I will admit that it may be difficult
to discern whether the Bishop has actually blamed Valjean or whether it is the case that he only
recognizes Valjean’s actions as blameworthy. I do not believe that this ambiguity should count
against my claim that one could blame another while also simultaneously demonstrating a
compassionate response, one that demonstrates hope that the wrongdoer can change and that
aims to facilitate that change. For example, one could imagine a similar situation that I will call
“Generous Roommate.” In this situation, someone acts so as to spare their friend or roommate
from hard punishment for stealing. Perhaps they recognize that their roommate grew up in a
dysfunctional home where stealing was considered the norm, and that he has been negatively
affected by these experiences. The thief’s roommate does not turn him into authorities, perhaps
even takes pity and gives him some money for the road, but also explains that he can no longer
be trusted in his current state and that the locks will be changed for the time being. He may also
express hope for reconciliation and the possibility of rebuilding trust once the roommate has
reformed himself or shown evidence of change.

In both these cases, the wronged does not deny blameworthiness, and in the latter case,
clearly blames the wrongdoer. Despite this, in both cases the response of the wronged towards
the wrongdoer aims to mitigate undue suffering. Furthermore, in both cases, this response need
not compete with the wrongdoer’s interest in conveying to the wrongdoer that he has done
wrong, while aiming to facilitate the recognition of moral reasons. The Bishop wants to see
Valjean spared from potentially hard punishment, but he also seems to have faith that his
response will help Valjean to respond to others in a way that is more morally acceptable. He conveys his recognition that Valjean acted wrongly, but forgoes the demand for an explanation or apology, perhaps because he presumes that Valjean will not, in the state in which he finds him, be able to give an adequate account of his actions or respond to his demands for a sincere apology. He communicates his recognition of Valjean’s wrongdoing without making Valjean suffer unfairly or cruelly. He also demonstrates a compassionate response that he hopes Valjean will reflect upon in order to change. As I noted earlier, in case of Generous Roommate, one can imagine this friend explaining to the wrongdoer why he cannot trust him as he may have done previously, while hoping that his kindness will help his roommate to reflect differently upon what he has done.

It is important to note that these modified expressions of blame do not guarantee that the wrongdoer does not suffer altogether, but it does aim to avoid inflicting suffering that is excessive, cruel or unfair. The Bishop recognizes that the State may punish Valjean excessively. He does not berate Valjean for his faults or demand that he give an account of his actions that may be impossible or grossly inadequate in his current state. Valjean may still experience the pain or burden that has been described in earlier chapters as being associated with coming to recognize the significance of his wrong and how it impairs his relations with others. Later in the story, Valjean himself describes himself as experiencing anger, agitation and confusion at having not been turned in to the authorities. Hugo describes Valjean’s experience after having been released by the Bishop as such: “He was the prey of a multitude of new sensations. He felt somewhat angry, he knew not against whom. He could not have told whether he were touched or humiliated.”

169 Hugo, Les Misérables, 66.
better to be in prison with the gendarmes, and that things had not happened thus; that would have
given him less agitation.”  

The suffering that Valjean experiences subsequent to the Bishop’s response does not seem to be the kind of suffering that the wrongdoer has a claim not to experience. It is also something that importantly is not and cannot be inflicted directly by the one who shows the compassion.

One has obligations to avoid being cruel and to avoid inflicting unfair, excessively hard treatment, but one does not have an obligation to express the kindness shown to the wrongdoer by both the Bishop and the generous roommate. They both express to the wrongdoer that they are hopeful that he can change and that they do not understand him to be solely defined by his wrongdoing. Nonetheless, the Bishop’s response to Valjean demonstrates how one might still communicate one’s recognition of wrongdoing while showing compassion and doing what one can to aid in the wrongdoer’s reform. This need not occur by engaging him directly with demands or questioning, but rather, in a more subtle manner, by conveying hope that he may change and by demonstrating what it is to show an interest in another’s well-being. In Hugo’s version, this act is indeed what gets Valjean’s conscience set right, so to speak. After stealing yet again subsequent to his release and upon encountering a priest, he starts to feel guilty and gives the priest money to give to the poor, even begging him to arrest him. Hugo describes Valjean as being overwhelmed by the weight of bad conscience.

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to explain the relation between blame, expressions of blame and communication. Drawing from the literature, I have sought to explain why blame is

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170 Ibid., 66.
171 If one shows compassion in order to make someone suffer or merely for consequentialist aims without regard for his well-being and an interest in avoiding unfair or cruel treatment, then he is not actually being compassionate or generous, but merely appears to be acting as such.
sometimes understood as implicitly communicative. I have explained why I reject this characterization of blame, in large part because I believe that it overlooks an agent’s own reasoning, and the variety of reasons that someone may have for failing to communicate blame or to seek an acknowledgement or response. Although I have explained why I believe that expressions of blame may encompass a set of expressions that could include unconscious, unintentional expressions, I have also restricted my discussion to expressions of blame that are consciously undertaken in order to communicate with the wrongdoer. I considered what relevance the literature on mercy might have for understanding how to respond to the plight of those who have difficulty recognizing moral reasons and adequately responding to blame, particularly because of having suffered poor formative circumstances. Though Tasioulas’ discussion of legal mercy and the communicative theory of punishment was useful in helping to understand when certain treatment might constitute excessive suffering or cruelty, I ultimately favored the language of reasons of compassion to explain the reasons one might have to respond to hardship by expressions of blame within relationships. I canvassed some of the sorts of reasons there may be not to express blame in these circumstances while recognizing the potential conflict between reasons not to express blame and reasons to express blame, particularly Moral Reality reasons, the reasons there are to express blame in a way that facilitates the wrongdoer’s recognition of Adams type “moral realities.”

Though I do not claim that this project of facilitation is something that the wrongdoer is obligated to undertake, I do want to recognize the fact that this undertaking can be considered to be morally valuable, other things being equal. This does not imply that all expressions or actions seeking to aid the agent in recognizing moral reasons are always permissible, but it does affirm that when undertaken permissibly, the goal is morally valuable. The recognition of moral reasons
both allows the agent to recognize certain realities and often has the consequence of allowing for the sustenance and repair of interpersonal relationships. Since discussions about modified expressions of blame can become quite abstract, I have drawn upon a literary example from *Les Misérables* as well as one of my own devising. I have considered these examples in the hopes of explaining how one might still express blame while modifying one’s response in recognition of the hardship that is caused from failing to recognize moral reasons or being unable to adequately respond to the demands and explanations involved in many expressions of blame. I hope that these examples give some sense of how one might still recognize wrongdoing and express blame in a way that avoids imposing excessive hardship, while aiding the wrongdoer in recognizing moral reasons when this aim is sought.

Reaching the end of this dissertation, I hope to have explained how it is that one can affirm some of the plausible claims of the UV argument without affirming its conclusion. These claims include the claim that poor formative circumstances can negatively influence how an individual recognizes moral reasons. It also includes the claim that blame can sometimes be uniquely burdensome for those who suffer the effects of these influences. I have hoped to explain how it is plausible to endorse these claims, while still calling into question the force of these influences on moral reasoning and the source of this burden. Because I favour a Scanlonian, relational view of blame, I also care about the health of relationships more generally. I hope that the last chapter has shown how one might blame a wrongdoer compassionately and in a way that is conducive to the recognition of moral reasons, something that is both good in itself and important for sustaining morally healthy relationships.

In discussing the facilitation of recognizing moral reasons, I have described it as a voluntary undertaking. Although I do not believe that this undertaking is obligatory, there is
more work to be done in considering the way in which different relationships influence the
strength of the reasons one has for pursuing this undertaking. For example, might family or close
friends have more of a reason to try to persevere in aiding someone’s recognition of moral
reasons given the nature of these relations, or might these reasons be more dependent upon an
individual’s own voluntary moral projects than their relation to the wrongdoer? It is important
that expressions of blame and the facilitation of moral reasons do not violate someone’s rights,
for example, by requiring coercion. With that in mind, it is interesting to consider the extent to
which an individual’s resistance to this facilitation is relevant in deciding when the endeavour
should be abandoned. Wrongdoers may be unwilling to engage in activities they find pointless or
uncomfortable, but that will ultimately help them to recognize moral reasons. There is an
interesting question of whether it is wrong to persevere in trying to get a wrongdoer to engage in
such activities if they find them unpleasant and distasteful, though this attitude may change over
time if only they persevered in this engagement. These are questions for another project, but I
hope that the aforementioned discussion has helped lay some groundwork that may be helpful in
answering other questions about the relation between blame, relationships and the activity of
recognizing moral reasons.
Bibliography


