

**The Structure of Blame
and its Relation to the Moral Emotions**

by

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Abstract

It is not clear what role emotions play in our conception and practice of blame. In this thesis, I aim to understand the role of the emotions in blame, and the question that I explore can be phrased in the following way: is blame *contained* in the emotions, or, conversely, are the emotions simply a part of blame? Two further questions are the offshoots of this one: what is involved in blaming others; and why do we have reason to care about the content that is involved in blaming others? I call these the substantive and normative questions of blame, which an account of blame must answer if it is to be satisfactory.

To situate this especially broad question, I will focus on R. Jay Wallace's account of blame. Wallace's position is that blame is in fact contained in the emotions. I will argue that Wallace's account holds too tight a relation to allow for responses to our judgments of blameworthiness. At most, Wallace's account admits of *expressions* of blameworthiness. Whether or not we should regard such expressions as necessary or sufficient to count as blame depends on what can be included in our responses to judgments of blameworthiness. To fill in the content of these responses, I turn to T.M. Scanlon's conception of blame. I conclude, in the light of our responses to judgments of blameworthiness, that purely emotional accounts reduce the reasons that we have access to in blaming others, and to that extent, weakens the normative significance that blame has for us.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. In Chapter 1, I provide a reconstruction of Wallace's reactive account. In Chapter 2, I advance the critical claim that Wallace's

reactive account is essentially nonreactive, since the components of blame that he is describing hold too tight a relation. In Chapter 3, I offer a reconstruction of Scanlon's account of blame, which is concerned with what is entailed through our responses to judgments of blameworthiness. Finally, in Chapter 4, I apply our knowledge from both accounts to sketch out what a commitment to either view entails, and to assess the reasons that we have to care about blame proposed by each account. I conclude, along with Scanlon, that Wallace's account is too thin, and that, on such a view, we lose sight of what is significant about blame.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A successful account of blame must be able to explain why the attitudes involved in blame is something we have reason to care about. Whether we see reason to blame others depends largely on what it is that we take ourselves to be doing in blaming others. This raises a substantive, as well as normative question, which an account of blame must answer if it is to be satisfactory. A conception of blame must be able to describe what it is that we are doing in blaming others, in such a way that makes our reasons for doing so apparent. What we require is an account of blame that meets both descriptive and normative conditions – we need to know what we are doing, and why doing so matters.

In recent discussions on blame, a point of tension has emerged concerning the role of the emotions in describing our practice of blame. Intuitively, when we think of blaming others, we often imagine *some* emotion being attached to that blame. Whether this intuition suggests that the emotions are an element of blame, or, conversely, that blame is *contained* in the emotions, has been an area of much contention. The latter position is attributable to R. Jay Wallace. Wallace has done impressive work pioneering an emotions-based account of blame that expounds upon P.F. Strawson's inception of the reactive attitudes.^{1 2} Wallace's reactive account claims that a person must be subject to one of the reactive emotions of either resentment, indignation, or guilt, if he or she is to count as blaming a person.³ The reactive account therefore locates both normative and

¹ Wallace, R. Jay. *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994. 18-74. Print.

² Strawson, P.F. *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008. 1-28.

³ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 30.

substantive contents of blame *within* the emotions. Wallace's reactive account will be a primary focus of this thesis.

T.M. Scanlon is similar to both Strawson and Wallace by focussing on interpersonal accounts of blame, but where Scanlon parts from them is in placing the emphasis not on the emotions, but instead on the "expectations, intentions and other attitudes that constitute these relationships".⁴ Placing the emphasis of blame on features that are internal to our relations with others alters both the substantive and normative content that blame has on Scanlon's account. Under Scanlon's conception, blame is not a matter of being subject to any emotion, but instead concerns whether a revision in one's relationship has been made, because of someone's blameworthy conduct towards him or her. Since Scanlon's account does not require the presence of an emotion to count as blame, it stands in useful opposition to Wallace's view, and will help to unearth the differences between each account respectively.

This thesis starts off with a broad, untethered question: what work do the emotions do in our conception and practice of blame? In an effort to harness this question, and make some headway, I situate it within the context of Wallace's account. The benefit of doing so is twofold. First, as I have mentioned, Wallace meets the outlined criteria by providing an answer to both the normative and substantive contents, which he claims that blame has; and, furthermore, doing so will narrow the focus of this thesis to the particular structure of blame that Wallace depicts through his account. The nature of this initial question is then altered to *why*, on Wallace's account, is blame limited to the

⁴ Scanlon, T.M. *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 128.

particular emotions that he discusses? The exclusivity of Wallace's account raises a pressing question: how do we make sense of the multitude of non-reactive emotions, or non-emotional responses that we have towards judgments of blameworthiness? Expressed differently, the times where I can be said to 'blame a person' may seem to outnumber the times where I was seized by a feeling of resentment or indignation. To answer this set of questions I turn to Scanlon's account, which brings light to the significance of our other-emotional and non-emotional responses to judgments of blameworthiness. This thesis will therefore include a large comparative element, though it is not essentially comparative. The central claims in this thesis are analytic.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. In Chapter 2, I provide a reconstruction of Wallace's reactive account. In doing so, I aim to bring light to the underlying logical structure of the reactive account, as well as Wallace's particular rationale. In Chapter 3, I advance the critical claim that Wallace's reactive account is essentially nonreactive, since the components of blame that he is describing hold too tight a relation. I argue that the major implication of this is that Wallace's account only allows for *expressions* of blameworthiness, rather than actual responses to our judgments of blameworthiness. That Wallace's account only allows for expressions of blameworthiness is a staple argument, and finding, of this thesis. Still, to fully articulate the extent of this claim, we are in need of a comparative element, which fills in the substantive content that can be included in our responses to judgments of blameworthiness. To accomplish this, I turn to Scanlon's account in Chapter 4. I offer a reconstruction of Scanlon's account of blame, which is concerned precisely with what is entailed through our responses to judgments of blameworthiness. Finally, in Chapter 5, I apply our knowledge from both of the explored

accounts to sketch out what a commitment to either view entails, and to assess the reasons that we have to care about blame proposed by each account. I conclude, along with Scanlon, that Wallace's account is too thin, and that, on such a view, we lose sight of what is significant about blame.⁵

⁵ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 143.

Chapter 2

Wallace's Reactive Account

R. Jay Wallace's reactive account of moral responsibility and blame is comprised of many different parts, and so it will be best to understand how the different pieces function independently before viewing the account as a whole. My strategy is to address a central thesis first, which claims that certain normative expectations hold a presumptive link with certain emotions. After which I intend to explain how the reactive sentiments are the only legitimate candidates to be subject to in order to count as blame; and how, as a result of this, the sanctioning responses are ascribed a natural and essential role in moral blame.

This reconstruction of Wallace's reactive account comes in three main parts. Section 2.1, as I have said, focuses on the central thesis on the connection between expectations and emotions. In discussing this, I will differentiate the kinds of expectations that are being referenced, and illustrate what it means for these expectations to be tied to particular emotions. I will then discuss the disjunction that Wallace includes in his initial account and how this disjunction makes room for judgments of blameworthiness. In section 2.2, I sketch out Wallace's reasoning for limiting the blaming sentiments to feelings of resentment, indignation and guilt. I then turn to the unique stance of holding someone to an expectation, and explain how this accounts for irrational reactive states, such as feelings of irrational guilt. The discussion on irrational guilt illuminates an aspect of Wallace's initial account that is in need of revision, if his account is to be focused exclusively with moral responsibility and blame. In section 2.3, I

take up this revision which Wallace argues improves upon his account; I also look at the role that the sanctioning responses are given under Wallace's account.

2.1 Expectations/Sentiments Thesis

The central thesis, upon which Wallace basis his account, comes from P.F. Strawson's paper "Freedom and Resentment". To aid in our understanding of Wallace's use of this thesis, it will be worthwhile to recognize what initially motivated Strawson to develop the connection between expectations and the emotions. It is implicit, in Strawson's paper, that he is presenting this argument as a pushback, or resistance, to the emerging utilitarian view on blame, which is focussed exclusively on the utility of blame. J.C.C. Smart, who is a proponent of this view, argues that attitudes of praise, and dispraise, matter, *because* they are useful. Such attitudes are useful because they help influence and promote desirable behaviour, and deter against undesirable forms of behaviour.⁶ According to Smart, the practice of these attitudes is justified precisely because of their high utility function and effectiveness as a catalyst for good conduct.⁷

Notice how on the utilitarian view, such attitudes have an essentially forward-looking character: the concern is with promoting a certain kind of behaviour, not with what any bad conduct might say about a particular person. Against the utilitarian view, Strawson argues that this description cannot adequately account for our experience, and the ways in which we in fact react to the perceived bad conduct in our inter-personal relations with others. Strawson asks us to consider, in our relations with others, "how much we actually mind, how much it matters to us, whether the actions of other people –

⁶ Smart, J.C.C. "Free Will, Praise and Blame", 304.

⁷ Smart, "Free Will, Praise and Blame", 306.

and particularly of some other people – reflect attitudes towards us of goodwill, affection, or esteem ... or contempt, indifference, or malevolence...”.⁸ This question brings light to the fact that we do care when others disregard us, but that the focus of this concern is not one with promoting certain types of behaviour. The content is instead backward-looking: we are concerned with what certain conduct says about a person’s regard or attitudes towards others, in relation to the regard in which he or she is *expected* to have towards others. The fact that we experience what Strawson calls the reactive emotions – resentment, indignation, gratitude, and so on – presumes that we *do* hold a demand on others in the ways that they conduct themselves towards us.

To view others in line with the utilitarian view would be to adopt what Strawson calls the objective stance, where we “see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what ... might be called treatment; ... to be managed or handled or cured or trained...”⁹ To take on the objective stance precludes genuine involvement with others. Hence the antithesis to the objective stance, and what the central thesis suggests, is that genuine involvement includes the demand on others to demonstrate a regard for us in their actions towards us; and what signifies the presence of the demand is our vulnerability in our inter-personal relations with others to a certain range of emotions in the case that the demand has been flouted, met, or surpassed.

Let us now look at Wallace’s interpretation of the demand, or expectation, that we have of others, in our relations with them. Like Strawson, the sense in which Wallace is using the term ‘expectation’, is to refer to a kind of demand or requirement that we have

⁸ Strawson, P.F. “Freedom and Resentment”, 5.

⁹ Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment”, 9.

of others in the ways that they conduct themselves towards us.¹⁰ This is relevantly distinct from other expectations, like predictive expectations, which we have in regards to events that we expect will occur in the future. Such predictive expectations, too, bear a connection with certain emotions: that I expect to defend my thesis by the end of January might incite within me feelings of anxiety, excitement, or perhaps even relief; I may be looking forward to drinking the coffee I have currently brewing, or just as well I could be indifferent since I am not a particular fan of the blend and am only drinking it for the caffeine buzz. Predictive expectations that we have of events that we expect will occur do not necessarily have any *presumptive* link with emotions, though certain emotions might be considered appropriate given the predictive expectation and their implications on our set of values as well as our relations with others. This distinction between an expectation's presumptive link with an emotion, versus the appropriateness of a certain emotion given some predictive expectation needs to be made clear.

A predictive expectation in and of itself need not demand of a person that he or she feel any one way, nor does the expectation itself render a person vulnerable to any special set of emotions. That I anticipate some thing or event will occur need not result in any particular feeling within me, even though it might be appropriate for me to feel a certain emotion given my knowledge of a future event and its relevance *to me*. If I have plans to meet with a friend who I have not seen in a number of years, that I look forward to our meeting is an appropriate way for me to feel, given that I consider this person to be a good friend. Similarly, if I had tickets to see Paul Simon live in concert, it would be appropriate for me to feel excited, given that I claim he is one of my favourite musicians.

¹⁰ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 21.

In either case, it follows from Wallace's view that lacking certain emotions, absent some justification, might raise a question about the extent to which I value either of these things. With regards to such predictive expectations then it would at least be appropriate that I feel a certain emotion since the expectation relates to the things I claim to value. The predictive expectation in and of itself, however, does not dispose the person to any particular emotion; rather this seems contingent on the person and their set of values.

Perhaps if we were to take a more mundane predictive expectation, one that is not so closely connected to a source of value, that such expectations do not entail a susceptibility to certain emotions should become clear. My plan to go grocery shopping later this afternoon does not in and of itself render me vulnerable to any particular group of emotions. This can yield in a number of various emotions, which depend, again, not on the expectation *itself*, but rather on my own disposition and circumstance. I can be a person that happens to like grocery shopping, or I can have a strong aversion to grocery shopping because I find the overwhelming selection to be disorienting. These emotions do not say anything revelatory or meaningful about the predictive expectation. And it is such expectations' openness to the various moods and feelings that they might provoke that indicates that they lack this tie, or shared constitution, with any particular group of emotions. Thus emotions that hold a *contingent* relationship with expectations, and do not predispose the agent to any particular set of emotions by virtue of its presence, means that there is no emotion *built in* to the expectation itself.

On Wallace's view what distinguishes our normative expectations, which are the expectations that we have of others in the way that they govern themselves towards us, is such expectations' shared constitution with a special class of emotions. When we hold

others to normative expectations, it is *internal* to taking on this stance that we are susceptible to certain emotions, and often become subject to them in the case of an expectation's being violated. Normative expectations therefore hold a presumptive link with particular emotions. It is, moreover, precisely this attitudinal positioning that Wallace claims is essential:

the crucial element 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.¹¹

Much more needs to be said about this concise statement. Remember that Wallace is using 'expectation' to refer to a kind of demand or requirement.¹² To that extent, failing to meet an expectation would be akin to violating a requirement. These, moreover, are not arbitrary demands or expectations that we place on others; on the contrary, as we should, in most cases, be able to provide these demands with reasons that count in favour of holding people to them.¹³ The stance that Wallace is referring to of "holding someone to an expectation" is being inter-defined with susceptibility to the certain "range of emotions". Wallace narrows this range of emotions, that is, emotions that have a mutual dependency with expectations, to feelings of resentment, indignation and guilt. These emotions make up of the reactive attitudes. The remainder of this section is devoted to

¹¹ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 21.

¹² Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 22.

¹³ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 22.

elucidating Wallace's statement; the next section turns to his reasoning for narrowing the class of blaming sentiments.¹⁴

First, since holding someone to an expectation entails *susceptibility* to reactive attitudes, it should follow that a breach in an expectation results in one's actually *being in* a reactive state. On the picture being described, we can view holding someone to an expectation, which entails susceptibility to reactive attitudes, as occupying one side of a coin. The other side of the coin is the breach of an expectation, which includes being subject to the reactive attitudes, and thus, is its concomitant flipside.¹⁵ We can view these as being part of the same event, or of one's being the other's inverse. Therefore one's being in a reactive state *just means* that there was a breach of an expectation, which further presupposes that the person had adopted the stance of holding someone to an expectation, and so was vulnerable to the reactive attitudes. Reactive states should then always function so as to track the breach of an expectation.

Understood this way, the absence of any independence between the violation of an expectation and a person's being in a reactive state is misleading. Breaches in expectations can come apart from reactive states, and, conversely, reactive states can separate from the breach of an expectation. Suppose, for example, that I have plans to meet with a friend, but she cancels last minute claiming she is much too busy with work. It just so happens that I run into her later attending a movie with a group of people. In such a case, I have proper standing to actually *feel* indignant towards my friend for her having lied. But let us stipulate that I am naïve, and I persuade myself into thinking that

¹⁴ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 21.

¹⁵ This is an analysis introduced by Frances Kamm in her *Intricate Ethics*. The analysis explains what it means for an event to be noncausally related.

because this is a one-off incident, and unlikely to recur, I should not assign too much weight to it. For whatever reason, this is successful in withholding any feelings of indignation towards my friend. The situation here describes the violation of an expectation (or requirement), but where the violation fails to result in my actually *being in* a reactive state. Thus violations and their attendant reactive states are not always as tight in relation as perhaps they ought to be, and so we should not rely on actually being in a reactive state to inform us on whether there has been a violation.

These remarks should help to illuminate Wallace's disjunction from the excerpt above. Recall the second part of the disjunction where he argues, "or to believe that the violation of the expectation would make it appropriate for one to be subject to those emotions".¹⁶ What Wallace would permit us to say then in response to this case is that so long as I believe it would be *appropriate* to feel a reactive attitude towards my friend due to her violation of an expectation, this then can amount to a judgment of blameworthiness.¹⁷ Blameworthiness is understood here by way of the reactive attitudes:

...Blame requires that you actually are subject to a reactive emotion, but an emotional response of this sort is not necessarily required for you to hold your colleague morally blameworthy. It suffices for you to believe that indignation or resentment would be fitting responses on your part, and that they would be fitting because the colleague has done something morally wrong.¹⁸

This is an important piece of Wallace's account since it recognizes first, as I have already mentioned, that there can exist some independence between a violation and

¹⁶ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 21.

¹⁷ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 73.

¹⁸ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 77.

experiencing a reactive attitude. In order for this to be the case Wallace requires that there be some justification which explains the absence of reactive attitudes given the breach of an expectation, and thereby suspends the reactive attitudes when they would be appropriate responses to have. The example I illustrated above does just that: it provides a story as to *why* the reactive attitudes were suspended in that case. We stipulated that I was an especially gullible or naïve person and so was able to brush off the incident. I would still be able to discern that my friend is blameworthy, so long as I can see that it would at least be appropriate to feel indignant towards my friend for her having lied.

On Wallace's view, what could we say of a case where there has been a breach of an expectation, but one does not feel any reactive emotion, nor do they take it to be appropriate to feel a reactive emotion? Wallace would argue that such a case simply begs the question: either I do not think the person has done anything morally blameworthy or I do not take them to be responsible.¹⁹ A person's failure to feel a reactive emotion given a breach of an expectation is something that demands an explanation on Wallace's account. That there must be some reason which explains the lack of emotion only helps reaffirm that the person *ought* to be in a reactive state. Therefore, any breach of an expectation that is not accompanied by a reactive state must at least maintain that it would be appropriate to be subject to a reactive emotion, if we are to assign a judgment of blameworthiness.²⁰

¹⁹ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 77.

²⁰ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 77.

2.2 Reactive Attitudes & Sanctioning Responses

I will now turn to Wallace's argument for narrowing the "blaming emotions" or reactive emotions to feelings of resentment, indignation and guilt. By narrowing the class of blaming emotions, Wallace's claim is that only these emotions of resentment, indignation and guilt will be considered as legitimate candidates for one to be subject to in order to blame. If we keep in mind Wallace's central thesis – that only certain expectations have a shared structure with certain emotions – his reasoning for narrowing the class of blaming sentiments becomes much clearer. If *only* reactive emotions are distinguished by their connection with expectations, and if not all emotions are reactive, then not all emotions will be distinguished by their connection with expectations. Thus not all emotions will be eligible to be subject to in order to count as blame.²¹

It is instructive to recall the discussion at the outset which discussed how certain predictive expectations do not dispose us to any set of emotions; and, conversely, certain emotions do not point to the presence of any particular expectation. Feelings of sadness are a case in point: I can feel sad at the fact that it is raining outside, at the change of season, or for no reason at all – I might just feel sad. This requires no explanation on my behalf; feelings of sadness need not indicate or be suggestive of any breach in an expectation. Any emotion that has this leniency in their occurrence, and does not demand that we refer to anything in particular to explain their presence, will not count as reactive. While one might incidentally experience hurt feelings or sadness as a result of a violation, such feelings are not legitimate candidates for one to be subject to in order to count as blame on Wallace's account. If, for example, after discovering my friend's

²¹ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 31.

betrayal, I feel sad, feeling sad here cannot amount to blame because it lacks an *essential* connection with expectations and therefore does not have the right kind of propositional content.²²

These other emotions that we experience in our interpersonal relationships are what Wallace calls the natural emotions. They can include feelings of “friendship, attachment, concern, sympathy, and love.”²³ While I might feel a sense of friendly affection towards my friend because I feel comfortable confiding in her, it is not so clear that this emotion has any tie with expectations, or at least not with the kinds of expectations that Wallace is concerned with. Reactive attitudes are more stringent than the natural emotions, since to be in a reactive state is something that demands an explanation. Reactive states are belief-containing attitudes or emotions that a person becomes subject to given their *belief* that there has been a breach of an expectation. The person’s belief that there has been a breach is what *explains* their being in a reactive state. Beliefs therefore play a salient role in distinguishing the reactive states by both explaining why the person is in the state, and ascribing such states with a clear propositional content.²⁴ Feeling resentment, for example, is not a dispersed or aimless emotion; on the contrary, as we feel resentment *about* something: I harbor feelings of resentment towards my friend *because* she lied. My belief about my friend having lied has the dual function of both specifying the content towards which the emotion is targeted, as well as explaining my feeling resentment, or being in a reactive state.²⁵ This,

²² Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 33.

²³ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 31.

²⁴ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 33.

²⁵ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 33.

moreover, gives the reactive emotions a highly cognitive element, which other emotions often lack.²⁶

In sum, expectations, to a degree, have a non-exclusive relationship with emotions, since one might still feel some natural emotion given a breach of an expectation. Nevertheless, natural emotions are not the sort of emotions we become *presumptively* disposed to by taking on the stance of holding someone to an expectation, and so these emotions are not called for when an expectation has been violated. Thus on Wallace's account only reactive emotions are both necessary and sufficient for blame because they have the relevant connection with expectations, and it is in virtue of this connection that such emotions are imbued with a sharp propositional content.²⁷

I mentioned earlier how it can sometimes happen that violations in expectations come apart from reactive attitudes. It can also, conversely, be the case that reactive attitudes come apart from a violation in an expectation. This occurs when one finds oneself in a reactive state, say feeling guilt, yet there has not been any breach of an expectation. Wallace devotes an entire section to discussing irrational guilt because this appears to pose a significant theoretical problem for his account: if guilt is a reactive state, and reactive states necessarily contain a belief about the violation of an expectation, then how can we make sense of an emotion's being reactive when it contains no such belief about a violation? This would seem to deprive the reactive states of their propositional content, and to that extent undermine what it means to be in such a state. Another way of phrasing the problem is that it appears to sever the essential connection

²⁶ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 33.

²⁷ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 33.

between expectations and the reactive attitudes by granting that we can become subject to a reactive attitude despite there not having been a violation.

Wallace responds to this problem by arguing that, “the stance of holding someone to a demand is *sui generis*; it cannot be assimilated either to the stance of internalizing a demand or to that of accepting a demand.”²⁸ A few concepts in this statement require clarification. Wallace here is following Allan Gibbard’s distinction which says that internalizing a demand or expectation is to “have some consistent motivation to act in conformity with the demand”, whereas accepting a demand “involves a further tendency to adduce reasons that support that demand...”²⁹ On the given description, internalizing a demand underdetermines acceptance of that demand, in that not all cases of internalizing a demand are coextensive with accepting that demand; though acceptance of a demand presupposes the demand to have been internalized.³⁰

To be sure, the former is not in itself sufficient for the latter because we can internalize a demand, and so be inclined to act in conformity with it, without, at that same time, endorsing the demand; whereby endorsement involves supporting it with reasons one recognizes. Wallace illustrates this with his example of Catholic guilt: people that have been raised Catholic might feel guilty when they act in ways that are contrary to Catholic standards and regulations, though they might not themselves accept such standards.³¹ Wallace concedes that holding someone or holding ourselves to expectations is in this regard “quasi-evaluative”, since we can still be made vulnerable to reactive

²⁸ Gibbard, Allan. *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*. Harvard University Press. 71.

²⁹ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 41.

³⁰ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 41.

³¹ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 43.

attitudes in cases where we hold others, or ourselves to expectations which we do not ourselves accept.³²

In such cases, a person would experience all the regular symptoms that arise from having flouted a demand that they in fact accept. Irrational guilt is in this way a *somewhat* negative self-assessment, since feeling guilt *is* for one to feel badly about oneself. The difference between irrational reactive attitudes and a rational reactive attitude is the clear cognitive dissonance that occurs within the person: he or she does not identify with their feeling that way because they do not take themselves to have violated any expectation that they *actively* endorse. The propositional content of such reactive attitudes nevertheless remain in tact – the person still feels guilty *about* something. Rather, it is the belief-containing element of reactive attitudes that becomes warped or erased because the person does not hold or accept the belief that normally functions so as to explain their being in a reactive state. To be clear, irrational reactive states are only *quasi*-evaluative since reactive attitudes usually pertain to expectations in a way that disposes us to think of ourselves, and others, in an evaluative way. The evaluative element is located in the assessment one becomes subject to from their having flouted a requirement that we endorse, and so reactive attitudes are in part reflective of this assessment. Irrational reactive states miss out on this cognitive dimension by bypassing our rationality, and subjecting others as well as ourselves to standards that we do not take to be justified. It is because of this peculiarity that features into the stance of holding someone to an expectation that Wallace claims it to be *sui generis*. It cannot be

³² Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 45.

exclusively aligned either with accepting or internalizing a demand since such a classification would be contrary to the way we sometimes experience these emotions.

2.3 The Revised Account

Wallace's focus, in developing his account, is to understand what is involved in the stance of holding someone morally responsible, and the distinctive responses that a person might incur in virtue of their being morally responsible. The possibility of being subject to an irrational reactive attitude, insofar as this entails holding one to standards that we do not ourselves endorse, illuminates an aspect of Wallace's initial account that is in need of revision. Moreover, notwithstanding irrational reactive attitudes, there is a further, independent reason, which would require that Wallace revise his account, if his focus is to be exclusively on moral responsibility. This reason is that the category of expectations is much broader in its scope than that of strictly moral obligations.³³ In this regard, a failure to meet a normative expectation is not the same as a strict violation of a moral obligation. Hence, in order to capture the more isolated focus of moral responsibility and blame, Wallace makes the following revision: "to hold someone morally responsible is to hold the person to moral expectations that one accepts."³⁴

If we remember that under Wallace's construal expectations are understood as a kind of prohibition or requirement, then moral expectations refer to "distinctively moral prohibitions or requirements", and thus "situates our practice of holding people morally responsible within a distinctive nexus of moral concepts, namely those of moral obligation, moral right, and moral wrong."³⁵ This revision fills the lacunae that were

³³ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 62.

³⁴ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 63.

³⁵ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 63-4.

highlighted in the initial account of holding someone to an expectation, and so narrows the focus of the account to violations of moral obligations. The revision also means that the stance of holding someone morally responsible disposes one to the strictly negative moral emotions of resentment, indignation and guilt, since the account is only concerned with violations of moral wrong. Moral praise, in this regard, is left out of the picture.

Aside from the revision, the moral account still preserves all the essential features that mark Wallace's initial account. Holding someone to moral expectations is still understood in terms of being attitudinally positioned so as to be susceptible to the reactive attitudes in the case that someone violates these obligations, or to hold "the belief that it would be appropriate for us to feel those emotions if the person should violate those obligations."³⁶ By connecting the reactive attitudes with moral obligations in this way imparts such emotions with a distinctively moral character, since being subject to a moral reactive sentiment necessarily contains a belief about the violation of a moral obligation.

Wallace's account also comes equipped with a ready explanation for the sanctioning responses of "avoidance, censure, denunciation, and scolding".³⁷ On the reactive account, the sanctioning responses are symptomatic of being in a reactive state, in that being in a reactive state inclines us towards these forms of responses, and can require these responses in order for such states to be properly expressed. The sanctioning responses can be viewed as being on a spectrum with reactive states, since, in virtue of being in a reactive state we are thereby made susceptible to its expression, and its

³⁶ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 66.

³⁷ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 67.

expression *just is* some form of sanction.³⁸ This takes care of any retributivist worry that is present in the literature on blame, the worry being that blame looks to intentionally inflict a kind of harm. On the reactive account, the sanctioning responses function so as to express the reactive state to which the person is subject. This neither looks to inflict harm, nor is it designed with the object of doing so; though suffering is sometimes an effect of the sanctioning responses' adequate expression.³⁹ What further vindicates the sanctioning responses from the accusation of their being intrinsically cruel is, again, their expression of *moral* sentiments, which are sharpened emotional responses to the breach of a moral obligation. As Wallace phrases it, "By giving voice to the reactive emotions, these responses help to articulate, and thereby to affirm and deepen, our commitment to a set of common moral obligations."⁴⁰ To value our moral standards and obligations is to react in the face of their being violated. This, therefore, ascribes the sanctioning responses with an essential role in blame, but without reducing blame to a mere sanction.

In a later article titled "Dispassionate Opprobrium", Wallace goes on to further illustrate how the reactive attitudes and their continuities with the sanctioning responses is what gives blame its distinctive quality:

My contention is that this expressive connection to the reactive sentiments is the key to understanding the special quality of blame. To count as blaming a person, you have to be *exercised* by what they have done, and to be exercised in the relevant way just is to be subject to one of the reactive sentiments...⁴¹

³⁸ To be sure, this is because reactive states are essentially negative attitudes.

³⁹ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 68.

⁴⁰ Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 69.

⁴¹ Wallace, "Dispassionate Opprobrium", 358.

This helps clarify the necessity, according to Wallace, of the actual *affective* aspect of blame. I have alluded to Wallace's conception of valuing throughout, but it is instructive to consider it more clearly now. For Wallace, the operative distinction is between recognizing that something has value and "actually valuing in the way that is called for by its value."⁴² What differentiates the two is the emotional engagement that is attributable to, and required, by the latter. This distinction sheds light on the significance of the moral emotions of resentment, indignation and guilt, since, in order to genuinely value our moral commitments, it follows that we be emotionally distressed in one of these ways when our moral commitments have been breached. So, while it is entirely compatible with *recognizing* the value of our moral commitments that we look to preserve our moral standards, and would advise others to act in conformity with them, this still underdetermines that we *in fact* value such commitments, since this requires some degree of being emotionally affected when these commitments have been disrespected. Therefore, on Wallace's view, affectless blame, or "dispassionate opprobrium", undermines what it means to blame, since it indicates that we do not appropriately care about the object of that blame. I will discuss this in more detail in the following chapter, but for now it is sufficient to note that it is this conception of valuing that Wallace is appealing to in order to undergird the normative capacity of the emotions in blame.

⁴² Wallace, "Dispassionate Opprobrium", 367.

Chapter 3

Expressions Vs. Responses to Judgments of Blameworthiness

The primary aim of the last section was to get a clear sense of how Wallace's reactive account operates in its entirety. Despite Wallace's account being called the reactive account of moral responsibility, I want to stress now how it is that his account is essentially non-reactive and noncausal. The term noncausal, as I am referring to it, describes when two different components are part of one and the same event. My aim in this section is to see what the implications are of blame having a noncausal structure, and what blame can amount to on such a view.

To simplify matters, it is instructive to consider first how this relation holds with a physical object. Say I place the A-side of a record into a record player so that the needle is placed in one of the grooves on the A-side, and the A-side is facing upwards so that I am able to see it spinning. The flipside of the A-side being faced upwards is that the B-side is facing downwards. Moreover, the B-side being faced downwards has, as its aspects, my being unable to see the front of the B-side, the needle is not sitting in any of its grooves, and I cannot listen to the songs that are stored on its side. The A-side being faced upwards does not *cause* the B-side to face downwards; rather, the relation is tighter – it is the noncausal flipside of the same event.⁴³ From herein I will use the term 'noncausal' to refer to this relation where two components are constitutive of the same event, and are in this way *built into* one another.

⁴³ This analysis and terminology is borrowed from Frances Kamm's *Intricate Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 140.

Recall, now, that Wallace is defining the stance of holding someone to moral expectations in what are essentially noncausal terms: “the basic stance of holding someone morally responsible involves a susceptibility to the reactive emotions if the person breaches moral obligations that we accept...”⁴⁴ Holding someone to moral expectations necessarily involves susceptibility to the moral emotions – they are conceptually dependent and inter-defined. Inasmuch as it contradicts conception to picture a one-sided coin, it is similarly contradictory, according to Wallace, to try and tease out susceptibility to the reactive sentiments from the stance of holding someone morally responsible.

When we hold someone morally responsible, we need not further state our susceptibility to these emotions – this is presupposed by virtue of taking on the stance.⁴⁵ It is also known that the violation of a moral obligation is part of the same event as being susceptible or subject to a moral reactive attitude, since being susceptible or subject to a moral reactive attitude just means that there has been a violation. The violation, again, does not *cause* the reactive attitude; rather the violation consists in the reactive attitude. Recall with the record analogy that the A-side’s facing upwards is *itself* informative of

⁴⁴ Wallace’s phrasing from this quote suggests that we *only* become susceptible to the reactive attitudes *in the case* that a moral expectation is breached. This, however, is misleading. It is true that we are rendered susceptible to the reactive attitudes in the case of a breach of an expectation since this is when we *may, in fact*, become subject to a reactive attitude. This does not mean we are insulated from the reactive attitudes by taking on the stance of holding someone responsible. Susceptibility, again, is presupposed by taking on this stance; insofar as holding someone to a moral obligation includes with it the possibility for that obligation to be disrespected. We are susceptible to reactive emotions then both by taking on the stance and through a breach of an expectation, but it is only through the latter that we can become subject to a *moral* reactive sentiment. Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, 66.

⁴⁵ The term ‘taking on’ perhaps exaggerates the extent to which this is voluntary.

the B-side's facing downwards. We need not further state that the B-side is facing downwards because this is known. Likewise it is similarly uninformative if, in the presence of a reactive attitude, we restate that there has been a violation. The violation is included in the *moral* reactive attitude itself.⁴⁶

In terms of the reactive attitudes indicating that there has been a violation, it of course must already be the case that there has been some such violation. Such violations, however, are something that we are capable of recognizing irrespective of the presence of a reactive emotion. Wallace claims that we cannot make a full diagnosis of a violation without some reference to the reactive emotions. It was discussed in the last section that we do sometimes experience a violation in a moral obligation without the associated reactive emotion. Take, for example, a storeowner, who happens to be deeply moved by the story of *Les Misérables*, and so does not feel any resentment towards the thief who robbed from him, since he suspects that he might have done it for what could be considered a good reason, like feeding his family. The storeowner can still recognize that the thief violated a moral obligation not to steal. He may even concede that it would be appropriate to feel resentment towards him. But what does this latter point amount to? How does granting that it would be appropriate to feel a certain way aid or supplement our understanding, or diagnosis, of there having been a violation? What was missing in our understanding of the violation before granting the appropriateness of the reactive attitudes? Accepting the reactive attitudes' appropriateness offers no new information, nor does it provide any further normative reason as to why we should care about such

⁴⁶ Or in the appropriateness of a reactive attitude in cases where there has been a violation of a moral obligation.

violations, other than to say that feeling a certain way *amounts* to a kind of caring. Thus it is suitable that we experience these emotions since a moral obligation has been violated, though one might not because of their convictions, circumstances or disposition.

Settling the question of whether or not it is appropriate to feel resentment or indignation towards a person is tantamount to ascribing blameworthiness on Wallace's account. What determines the appropriateness of a reactive attitude hinges on whether there has been a violation. We know this to be true because reactive attitudes, absent a moral violation, are either non-moral reactive attitudes or irrational reactive attitudes. Wallace's implicit suggestion is that we appeal to the violation of an expectation *indirectly* by way of the reactive attitudes, when we could just as well appeal to the violation itself. To be sure, on Wallace's view, there is little conceptual difference between saying it would be appropriate to feel a reactive attitude and saying that there has been a violation. Nevertheless in such cases where this is a violation, yet no corresponding reactive attitude, we need not further ask whether it would be appropriate to feel a reactive attitude in order to determine blameworthiness. Appealing to the violation is itself sufficient. Asking on the appropriateness of reactive attitudes is an additional step that only points to what is already proven, and so is merely a different way of posing the same question. This strategy that Wallace is endorsing of ascribing blameworthiness is therefore strained, and suffers from a clear circularity. The circularity is heightened by the fact that there is no independent reason to invoke the reactive attitudes when determining a person's being blameworthy, other than simply to preserve

the role of the emotions in forming such judgments. It seems that so far as blameworthiness is concerned, the role of the reactive attitudes are redundant.⁴⁷

Blame, however, requires that we be in a reactive state. It is instructive to reconsider what precisely differentiates a judgment of blameworthiness from actual blame on Wallace's account. Both judgments of blameworthiness and blame require for there to have been a violation, as well as the belief that it would be appropriate to be subject to a reactive attitude given the violation. To not maintain that it would at least be appropriate to be subject to a reactive attitude begs the question as to whether one views the person as a proper subject to be held morally responsible, or that one does not truly take the person to have done anything morally wrong. Blame, then, further requires that you feel some reactive emotion, and with that the inclination towards the sanctioning responses of reproach, denunciation, scolding, and so on. Recall that the sanctioning responses are the form of expression that the reactive attitudes take, which express the belief about the violation of a moral obligation. Even when it comes to instances of blame the reactive attitudes are circular insofar as revealing anything of their own accord; however, they yield the affective element and sanction, which is what Wallace argues gives blame its distinctive character.

The phenomenon of blame that Wallace is describing all occurs within the same single event: we have a violation of an obligation, which is contained in the reactive attitude, and expressed through a sanctioning response. Blame, on this depiction, holds an

⁴⁷ It might sometimes happen that we feel a reactive attitude, like resentment, and only after ruminating over the emotion do we come to realize that a moral obligation has been violated. That reactive attitudes could prompt such introspection however does not detract from the point that we are capable, and often do recognize such breaches despite not feeling any reactive emotion.

essential, noncausal relation, which is why we are disposed only to the particular attitudes of resentment, indignation and guilt, as well as the form of sanction that yields in their adequate expression.

It is in this sense that I say the reactive attitudes are essentially non-reactive. They are not *reacting* to a violation – rather, they are part of the violation. Under this depiction, blame cannot be a response to a judgment of blameworthiness; instead blame amounts to a targeted emotional *expression* of a person's being blameworthy. Insofar as blame consists in the violation of the obligation itself, it is not severed from the violation in a way that it could be considered a response *to that* violation. This raises a question: what is it that we are doing when we blame a person? Are we merely expressing, emotionally, a person's violation of a moral obligation? Or is blame a response to a judgment of blameworthiness, rather than just an emotional expression of it? If blame is not a response to a person's being blameworthy, then what do we call such responses to judgments of blameworthiness?

In the course of answering this set of questions, I must provide a fuller account of what responding to judgments of blameworthiness entails, and how this differs from expressions of blameworthiness. The underlying logic that Wallace has depicted in his account rests on the idea of blame being a sequence that occurs under the same event. Most notably, where I part from Wallace is in breaking from this noncausal chain where blame exclusively occurs within a single, tight relation. I argue that blame can also be understood as having a *causal* relation to judgments of blameworthiness, and that it is this relationship of causality which constitutes actual responses to our ascriptions of blameworthiness.

Responding to a person's being blameworthy then requires some degree of separation from the event that determines a person's blameworthiness. If one recognizes that there has been some violation, and that violation then *causes* one to react or respond in some way, then this reaction constitutes a separate event from that of the initial violation itself. If we concede that blame can have this causal relation and thus be part of a different event from that of the violation itself, then this severs the *necessary* connection between blame and the reactive attitudes since blame can be understood as being separate from that of the violation, which has a mutual constitution with the reactive attitudes. The most obvious and noteworthy implication of allowing for this separation is that blame here is not immediately identified with a reactive emotion or with a sanction, though it often takes this form. Therefore admitting of this separation would mean that being subject to a reactive emotion is not necessary in order to blame, and that blame might be open to different sorts of responses; though something more substantive needs to be said about what that entails.

Before moving forward, I would like to more precisely qualify the claims that have been made. First, I have not yet answered whether expressions about the violation of an obligation should be considered as sufficient to in fact count as blaming a person. My view is that Wallace's account does in fact describe the kind of phenomena, which we often find ourselves subject to: that in which we are subject to a reactive attitude in the face of a moral violation. While I take this account to be lacking in any real normative significance, that alone does not work to discredit its validity, at least on a descriptive level. We will be in a better position to judge whether Wallace's account is itself sufficient after considering different responses to blameworthiness, as well as

recognizing what would be at stake in accepting Wallace's view. My main contention, however, with Wallace's view, is that it confines blame to these episodes of emotional expression about the violation of an obligation. This limitation is problematic when we recognize that there are a variety of ways to respond to the content of what makes a person blameworthy, which are not confined to experiencing resentment, indignation or guilt. The question that I press on Wallace is what do we then call these negative responses to judgments of blameworthiness, if not blame?

3.1 Responses to Judgments of Blameworthiness

Consider an example that will help illustrate the differences between Wallace's account and the responses to blameworthiness that I have been suggesting. Towards the end of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Jim, who is a runaway slave, becomes re-imprisoned by the Phelps family so that they can claim the reward set on Jim of two hundred dollars.⁴⁸ Huck, who by this point has developed a close friendship with Jim, sets out to free Jim on his own, when Tom Sawyer arrives and surprisingly agrees to help him in this endeavor. Tom, however, is much more infatuated with the idea of experiencing a genuine prison break than he is with actually freeing Jim, so at the expense of Jim's freedom and Huck's efforts, Tom fabricates a number of further obstacles for all of them to undergo, just for the sake of having an adventure. Unbeknownst to both Huck and Jim, Tom has all the while been withholding information that Jim is in fact already a free man.

Tom's exploitation of Jim, as well as exploiting his friendship with Huck, all for his own advantage, violates a moral obligation not to harm and exploit others. Both Jim

⁴⁸ Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

and Huck have grounds to feel indignant towards Tom, and their indignation would be couched in the belief that Tom violated a moral obligation not to exploit and take advantage of others for one's own benefit. Their indignation, which might manifest itself in a form of reproach or avoidance, would then express this belief about Tom's having violated a moral obligation. This expression amounts to blame on Wallace's account.

If we recall from the beginning of the novel, this kind of behaviour is not at all unusual for Tom, and so it is not in the least bit shocking to Huck that Tom would go to such great lengths to set free an already free man, just for the sake of an adventure. Let us suppose that Huck's familiarity with Tom is what keeps Huck from feeling indignant or resentful towards Tom; since it is in keeping with Tom's character that he acted as he did. Should the fact that he does not feel resentment or indignation preclude him from being able to blame Tom for acting as he did? Are there no other ways of responding to the content of what Tom did that would also amount to blame? For example, Huck might not feel one of the reactive emotions, but he can still recognize that he has reason to distance himself from Tom, given Tom's ease with exploiting and taking advantage of others. This, moreover, would constitute a *response* to a judgment of blameworthiness, because Huck would be acting on the reasons that there are to reevaluate and correct his relationship with Tom, and this would be part of a separate event from that of the original violation. Here Huck would be responding to Tom's violation, but not with an emotion or with a response that is designed as a sanction, though, again, this might be a foreseeable effect.

It still might be objected that avoidance or distancing oneself are not sufficiently distinct from the sanctioning responses that are essential to blame on Wallace's account,

and so this suggestion yields in the same outward response. Remember that on Wallace's account, such responses only count as blame if they work to express a reactive attitude, so in this way a sanctioning response presupposes the presence of a reactive attitude. My suggestion differs from Wallace's by arguing first that the sanctioning responses are not only available to us through the reactive attitudes. While I might not feel resentment towards someone, I can still recognize that I have good reason to scold him or her, or avoid or distance myself because he or she has a tendency to manipulate or take advantage of others, though the latter is not aimed at a kind of sanction. The sanctioning response here is still based on the reasons that make a person blameworthy, and so this reaction preserves the belief-containing element that is essential to the reactive attitudes, but removes the requirement for an emotion since responses to violations do not share a constitution with the reactive emotions, as they occupy a separate event. It is also not *necessary* to respond with a sanction, though this more or less depends on the kind of violation that occurred. I will discuss this in more detail later on.

The overarching question that I have been stressing is what would Wallace call these reactions, which lack an emotional component, but are nevertheless responses to the content of a judgment of blameworthiness? Wallace would likely argue that such responses could only amount to dispassionate modifications, which happen to be responding to a judgment of blameworthiness. This need not pose a real concern for Wallace since his claim is that blame simply requires for there to be an emotion. While I do not share this intuition, Wallace does offer reasoning for why he maintains that the emotions are essential. As I have mentioned, his main contention with accounts of blame that lack an affective component is that they undermine the extent to which the person

was “exercised in the relevant way” by the moral violation.⁴⁹ On his view being affected in the relevant way just means being subject to one of the reactive attitudes.

He supports this position by arguing that it follows from valuing our moral norms and standards that we be genuinely affected when these standards have been violated. The argument here takes the form of a conditional: *if we value our moral norms, then we will be emotionally distressed when these norms have been disrespected*. The problem with this argument is that it skirts the question of what blame is, by conflating two distinct concepts: a question about what it means to value something, with what it means to blame a person. These seem to me to be distinct questions – appealing to a conception of valuing does not answer the question of what it is that we are doing when we blame someone, or why we necessarily have reason to care about blame. If a person does something that is blameworthy, it seems odd to suggest that, as a prerequisite to blame, I personally have to value the principle that has been violated through the person’s bad conduct. The considerations in regards to which a person is made blameworthy ought to be sufficient one’s to respond to in order to blame. Whether or not I value them as such seems to be a separate question. I will also note that Wallace takes for granted that the only way to demonstrate that we have been affected *is* through such emotions. I will discuss this point in the final chapter.

Evidently, Wallace offers an entire account that is structured around the reactive emotions, which explains precisely what he takes us to be doing when we blame others. Though the logical structure of Wallace’s account itself does not necessarily exclude responses to blameworthiness which lack an affective component; rather, this is

⁴⁹ Wallace, “Dispassionate Opprobrium”, 358.

Wallace's additional qualification. I have said at the outset that it is intuitive that blame should have this emotional element. However, on the account Wallace offers, we cannot appeal to what it is that we are doing in blaming others to understand why blame should be so confined to the emotional candidates that Wallace suggests. We instead have to appeal to something that is not in itself internal to the question or practice of blame, in order to secure the necessity of these emotions. I find this to be unsatisfying. The reasons that we have to view the emotions as essential to blame should be answered by what we are doing in blame itself. That we are not given such an answer by Wallace is a serious weakness of his account.

Chapter 4

Scanlon's Conception of Blame

In this section I turn to T.M. Scanlon's account of blame, which he offers in his book *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*. Scanlon's account exemplifies the sorts of responses to judgments of blameworthiness that I have been discussing, and it does so by placing the focus on "the expectations, intentions, and other attitudes that constitute these relationships rather than on the moral emotions such as resentment and indignation."⁵⁰ A critical implication of placing the emphasis on the constitution of our relationships, is that this admits of a variety of attitudes that can be involved in blame, which become internal to the practice of blame. This is particularly important for my purposes since this will allow for responses to judgments of blameworthiness, which are not confined to feelings or resentment, indignation, and guilt. Scanlon's account, moreover, has the further advantage of being able to incorporate Wallace's reactive emotions, as well as the breadth of attitudes that are involved in responses to judgments of blameworthiness, which are not limited to the experience of the moral emotions.

This reconstruction comes in three main parts. Section 4.1 focuses primarily on the ground relationship, through which we can evaluate whether a person's action displays attitudes that are defective relative to the standards that are set by that relationship. Section 4.2 focuses on the normative significance that the impairment has for us; I also discuss the variety of ways in which one can respond to a judgment of blameworthiness. Finally, in section 4.3, I focus on Scanlon's moral relationship, which deals with the problem of blaming strangers on Scanlon's account.

⁵⁰ Scanlon, T.M. *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*. 128.

4.1 The Ground Relationship

To account for what is normatively significant about blame *for us*, Scanlon's concern is with the kind of regard that we ought to have for one another *relative to the relations* that we stand in to each other.⁵¹ Insofar as certain conditional relationships are constituted by expectations, intentions and attitudes, different relationships will vary in the kind of regard that they demand for the people who stand in these relations to have for one another. I demand more of a regard from the attitudes that are displayed by a spouse than I would a co-worker, and perhaps more from a co-worker than I would the barista who works at the coffee shop that I regularly attend. Consider, for example, the set of expectations, intentions, and attitudes, which grounds the relation of friendship, and informs us of the kind of regard that we expect those whom stand in this relation to have in the ways that each party acts towards one another. In the set of intentions, being friends with a person means being inclined to "give help and support when needed...to confide in the person and to keep his or her confidences in return...to spend time with the person."⁵² To truly be friends with a person does not just mean holding such intentions, but actually being inclined to behave and act in these ways when one can.⁵³

Being friends with a person also means being disposed towards certain feelings. If a friend has received unfortunate news or is in a bad way, it is appropriate that one should feel distressed or sad for them. Conversely, if things are going well for a friend it is fitting that one should be happy for them and be glad to receive such news. If, for

⁵¹ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 138. Whereby 'regard' I mean the kind of concern that our actions display towards others, which reveal the attitudes we hold towards them.

⁵² Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 132.

⁵³ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 132. There is a difference between theoretically endorsing an intention versus acting on it when one can.

example, you share news of a recent promotion with a friend and they seem bored or disinterested, then this should raise a question for you about the extent to which this person cares about you and takes an interest in your life.⁵⁴

It would also be in tension with the meaning of friendship if a person's only reason for acting as a friend were from a sense of duty or obligation, rather than out of genuine affection and concern.⁵⁵ A person might feel obligated to help her friend precisely *because* he or she is one's friend, but this sense of obligation flows from the attitudes and dispositions that make up a friendship, not the other way around. If the *only* reason I go to visit my friend at the hospital is out of a sense of obligation as one's friend, then I am failing to respond to the other reasons that apply in this situation: to *want* to see how she is doing, to provide support for her, to spend time with her, and so on.

To be friends with someone means being governed in one's intentions and attitudes towards his or her friend by the reasons and considerations that constitute and are presupposed by the relation of friendship. One's being moved to act as one's friend in a particular situation for reasons that are external or contrary to the value of friendship would be a misleading and false interaction. If, in a situation where after hearing news of a friend's promotion to a higher-up position in a company, I feign excitement and interest because I suspect there might be a chance that she could get me a job with the same company, this interaction with my supposed friend would be misleading and dishonest because I would be acting solely out of personal gain rather than from the considerations

⁵⁴ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 132.

⁵⁵ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 132.

that follow from friendship.⁵⁶ In other words, the *meaning* of this interaction depends on the reasons that moved me in so acting: by acting solely out of personal gain I fail to be moved by the reasons that flow from standing in the relation of friendship with another person. Thus the content of my action, which my friend took to be one of genuine interest, was in fact deprived of that quality, which would otherwise make it an act of friendship. A necessary feature of friendship is that both parties that stand in this relation share the intentions and attitudes which make up of this relation.⁵⁷ As Scanlon phrases it: “Mutuality is not a further, independent feature of friendship but is presupposed by the attitudes that constitute it.”⁵⁸ As I illustrated with the example above, the intentions that I ought to have had in asking about my supposed friend’s promotion, namely out of genuine interest and excitement for my friend, were not in fact the considerations that moved me in so acting. What my so-called friend took us to be then doing in having such an exchange was misled to believe it was something that it was not. What are the implications of my action *for my friend*, when I have acted in a way that is contrary to the standards that are set by friendship, while at the same time purporting to stand in this relation towards the person with whom I am having the interaction? Scanlon’s account of blame functions so as to place a structure around the normative implications that impairments, in the constitution of our relationship with others, can have on our relations with others. Here is Scanlon’s proposal:

⁵⁶ To be sure, this would be an act of deception and so not only external to the value of friendship but also contrary to it. Personal gain need not in itself be contrary to friendship, though acts of deception are.

⁵⁷ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 133.

⁵⁸ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 133.

To claim that a person is *blameworthy* for an action is to claim that the action shows something about the agent's attitudes towards others that impairs the relations that others can have with him or her. To *blame* a person is to judge him or her to be blameworthy and to take your relationship with him or her to be modified in a way that this judgment of impaired relations holds to be appropriate.⁵⁹

In explaining this concise statement, it will be instructive to use an example. Consider first Scanlon's example of an impairment that is made relative to the standards that are set by friendship:

Suppose I learn that at a party last week some acquaintances were talking about me, and making some cruel jokes at my expense. I further learn that my close friend Joe was at the party, and that rather than coming to my defense or adopting a stony silence, he was laughing heartily and even contributed a few barbs, revealing some embarrassing facts about me that I had told him in confidence.⁶⁰

Such a situation would surely generate prudential considerations for me: I should be more wary of what I tell Joe in confidence knowing now that he has a propensity to share such information in these situations. Knowing that I have to be careful of Joe in this regard might also result in a kind of assessment of Joe's character, particularly in his performance as one's friend. In the checklist of what makes up of a good friend, so to speak, we could say that Joe is deficient in this aspect of keeping one's secrets. But the attitudes that are involved in blame, and ought to be involved in blame, are not merely

⁵⁹ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 128-9.

⁶⁰ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 129.

prudential or evaluative; we are not simply concerned with grading Joe's character, or worried with how he might behave in the future. Rather, Joe's failure to live up to the conditions of friendship, in a situation where he ought to have done, holds a special significance for the victim of Joe's action.

The reasons that a person responds to, or fails to respond to, in the way that they go about treating others, affects the range of relations that we can have with that person. As we saw with Joe, his failure to be moved by a consideration of friendship, in a circumstance where it was called for, holds implications on the sorts of relations that the victim can have with him. Supposing that the victim recognizes that she has such a claim, as Joe's friend, not to have her secrets exposed for the purpose of amusing of others, and that the victim is not herself inept in recognizing that her friends hold this claim on her, then Joe's behaviour carries a special significance for her and the relations she can have with Joe.

Let us first consider Scanlon's conception of blameworthiness. To form a judgment of blameworthiness is to reach a conclusion about the meaning of a person's action, and to understand the meaning of their action to be one that "impairs the relations that others can have with him or her".⁶¹ In the situation with Joe, we could gather certain information, through his actions, about the attitudes he holds towards his friend. In our critical assessment of Joe's behaviour we can gather that the claim that his friend has to not have her secrets revealed was not given sufficient weight in Joe's deciding on how to act, so as to actually prevent him from acting in this way. For this to be the case it need not have been Joe's main goal to reveal the personal information: perhaps his real aim

⁶¹ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 128.

was to gain a few laughs and he knew that to share the information would be a sure way of doing so. While Joe's direct aim may not have been to reveal the information, it is nevertheless part of what he took himself to be doing in acting; and so the fact that he would be revealing his friend's personal information that was told to him in confidence did not sufficiently play into his reasoning so as to count against his acting in this way.⁶²

The significance, however, of Joe's action for the victim will turn based on what his true intentions were – whether he was acting out of malice, or out of a lack of regard, or even if he felt truly conflicted about his behaviour – each holds a different set of implications for the relations that the victim can have with Joe. Barring that there are any available excuses which Joe might appeal to, which would sever Joe's agency from his action, there still remains a defective quality in each of the groups of attitudes that was mentioned, relative to the normative standards set by friendship. Thus for the victim to judge that Joe is blameworthy is for her to take that action as in fact revealing something defective about Joe's attitudes towards her, considering that they stand in the relation of friends.

The meaning of Joe's action, and the negative conclusion that it affirms in his attitudes towards her holds a normative significance *for the victim*: some change in their relation *ought* to be made on the part of the victim, given that there now exists an impairment in the relationship, of which she has been made aware. The actual intentions and attitudes that make up of their relationship became impaired when Joe, in deciding how he would treat his friend, was governed by reasons that are "ruled out by the

⁶² Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 11.

standards of that relationship".⁶³ What Scanlon is suggesting we do in instances of blame is to make the modifications that are called for, given the impairment that now exists in the relationship.

There are a few possible ways that one might go about making the relevant modifications in his or her relationship with the person that they have judged to be blameworthy. Continuing with the example of Joe, the victim might re-endorse the judgment of blameworthiness that has been made, thereby reaffirming the meaning of Joe's action as well as its implications on the sorts of relations that she can have with him. This still leaves open the question of "how seriously one is going to take it, and how far one is going to go in adjusting one's attitudes ... in the ways that this judgment claims are appropriate".⁶⁴ In taking this judgment seriously, the victim may go on to decide that certain revisions in their relationship are indeed called for: she can decide to no longer share personal information with Joe, or might consider the things that Joe says with further qualification than she would have prior to the incident. The victim might also consider it to be appropriate, given the impairment that has been made, to avoid Joe, or reproach him for what he had done; thereby expressing the significance of his action, and its implications for their relationship, *to* him.

While these responses to judgments of blameworthiness are often coextensive with one another, it is important to see how it is that they are to some extent distinct. In the first instance, the response to a judgment of blameworthiness is one that remains internal to the injured party: one's registering the fact of the other's failure to respond to a

⁶³ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 135.

⁶⁴ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 130.

claim that he or she has given their relation to each other. To count as blaming a person, on Scanlon's account, the judgment of blameworthiness has to be taken seriously, and taking such judgments seriously means that some change in the relationship will be made going forward in one's relations with that person.

This is what is demonstrated in the second instance, where revisions in the constitution of that relationship are made. The injured person revises the standing intentions, attitudes and dispositions of that relationship in light of the normative significance that the judgment of blameworthiness has for him or her. Recall that the significance of one's action is a function of the reasons that moved him or her in so acting. So if we suppose that Joe acted out of a complete lack of regard for his purported friend, then this would give the victim a decisive reason to no longer value being friends with him, since his attitudes towards her entirely undermine the meaning of friendship. If, however, the normative implications of his action was less extreme, albeit still damaging, then the victim should make the relevant modifications given the consideration that had been flouted. This might mean that she is much more careful in what she chooses to share with Joe, since he does not have the appropriate regard for the things she shares with him, which she considers to be personal. Their relationship as friends can still continue, but it will be defective in this aspect.⁶⁵

In the third instance, the response to a judgment of blameworthiness includes an expressive component: "I might complain to Joe about his conduct, demand an explanation or justification, or indicate in some other way that I no longer see him as a

⁶⁵ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 136.

friend”.⁶⁶ To express the wrongdoing to the person that is blameworthy might be appropriate given the significance that the action has for the victim. If the victim sees the action as being deeply corrosive to their relationship, then this gives him or her reason to assign a heavier normative significance to that action, which in turn calls for a more severe modification to that relationship. In such cases a person could also become subject to a reactive emotion like resentment or indignation; this is entirely compatible with Scanlon’s account, though, again, not essential to it. The victim is just as open to feel other natural emotions, such as sadness, to still count as blaming the person.

As these different responses indicate, Scanlon’s focus in blame is with making the relevant modifications in the relationship, given the impairment. It would be too quick, on this account, to immediately identify blame with a sanction; like a form of reproach or scolding. Not all impairments call for a sanction; and in such cases revisions in the relationship can be made without the expressive component that the sanctioning responses include. In fact, being subject to a reactive emotion or even sanctioning the person that is blameworthy does not preclude questions about whether the relevant modifications in the relation has been made. I might be seized by a feeling of resentment after learning of a friend’s betrayal towards me, but once the feeling subsides I can nevertheless fail to change my attitudes and intentions towards this person. This raises the question as to whether blame had occurred in this instance.

To further understand the significance of the attitude that Scanlon is drawing attention to, it is instructive to consider what would be at stake if we were to forego the attitude of blame altogether. Insofar as relationships are constituted by the expectations,

⁶⁶ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 130.

intentions and attitudes that make up of a particular relationship, if someone, while standing in the relevant relation, holds attitudes that run counter to the standards that make up of the relationship, then this alters the quality of that relationship.⁶⁷ If we could not make the adjustment that is called for given that there is a defective aspect of that relationship, then we would have to continue moving forward with that relationship on false grounds. We would be unable to make the adjustment that is necessary in order to modify the relationship into what it already is. It has been discussed how this is particularly illustrative in the case of friendship: friendship operates under the assumption that both parties share the same set of intentions, dispositions and attitudes towards each other. If one party recognizes that the other holds attitudes that are contrary to the ideal of friendship, then this fundamentally changes their relationship and the ways in which they can relate to one another. The injured person has a reason to see themselves as being separated or distanced from the other, *because* of his or her failure to respond to a consideration that is internal to their relationship. This fact about the other's attitudes prevents them from being the sorts of friends which ideally they would be. We can see a straightforward example of what Scanlon has in mind in the case of spousal relationships: if a person has not been faithful to his or her partner, then the partner that has been wronged lives under a false impression of what their relationship really is.⁶⁸ If we could not practice the attitudes that Scanlon is suggesting blame involves, then we would, to varying degrees, be unable to move forward in our relationships on the grounds on which they in fact exist.

⁶⁷ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 135.

⁶⁸ To consider an extreme version of what Scanlon has in mind, think of the character Truman from the film *The Truman Show*.

To further distinguish blame as Scanlon is presenting it, consider what relevance blame would have in the absence of its punitive, evaluative or other expressive elements. Suppose we lived in a dystopian world where the reasons that there were to treat each other well became heavily incentivized: perhaps an apparatus existed where each person had a moral ranking, and everyone had access to each other's moral score. Further stipulate that depending on your score, you would be granted certain benefits, both associatively and materially, and were more generally assigned a high status which would confer a variety of advantages.⁶⁹ An effect of this arrangement would be that people would be motivated to treat each other well, but the content of their actions would be bereft of the normative reasons that there are to treat one another well. Would we have any use for the attitudes that are involved in blame in this kind of a society? Under Scanlon's conception of blameworthiness and blame, what one has to come to terms with in regards to the actions that are directed at him or her, is the meaning of a person's action, and the significance that the meaning has for one's relations with them. Thus if a person is treating you in ways that are permissible, or perhaps even admirable, but only for the sole purpose of receiving future rewards, then this sheds light on a deficiency in his or her attitudes towards you. In other words, if the considerations preventing this person from harming you or treating you poorly is that they expect to secure some great benefit by doing so, then this holds implications on the sorts of attitudes that this person harbors towards you and on the ways that you are able to relate to him or her. Modulating one's relations with another person so that the relationship matches the actual, defective

⁶⁹ This is a variant of a concept in the *Black Mirror* episode entitled "Nosedive".

intentions, attitudes and dispositions that make up of that relationship is therefore tantamount to blame on Scanlon's account.⁷⁰

Finally, Scanlon's account focuses on the kind of regard that our actions display towards others, but not all ways of one's going about acting carry implications on his or her relations with others, so it is important to distinguish between acts that do hold these implications from those that do not. A person that lacks ambition or punctuality certainly displays faults in their character, but such faults do not necessarily tell us something about the way he or she views others or the kind of regard that he or she holds for others. Defective features of a person's character could result in others' being reluctant to make plans with this person, or perhaps in being more particular about when one chooses to see him or her because their lack of ambition can put one in a slump. Avoiding someone or being reluctant to make plans with him or her because of a fault in that person's character should not be mistaken for an instance of blame, though such responses to defective aspects of a person's character may yield in the same outward appearance as a kind of sanctioning response.

To bring light to the difference between the attitudes that are involved in avoiding someone because of a negative character trait versus an instance of blame, it is relevant to ask what it is that we would be doing in responding to a person's faulty character in these ways. If I am being careful about when I choose to see someone because I am aware that their unsavory disposition can sometimes rub off on me, responding to this kind of a consideration would simply be managing my relations with that person so as to prevent myself from being in an unpleasant state of mind. It is difficult to locate where the blame

⁷⁰ Given that there exists an impairment in the relationship.

would reside in being moved by this type of a prudential consideration. It would seem to make more sense, in such a case, to say that we can criticize this person for having this defective aspect in their character, rather than to say that we *blame* them.⁷¹ However, what decisively disqualifies this kind of a response from being one of blame is that a deficiency in a person's character need not necessarily display, in that person's actions, the kind of regard that he or she holds for others.

4.3 The Moral Relationship

The discussion up until now has been concerned with blame as it occurs in particular relationships that we stand in, like a friendship. But how, on Scanlon's view, can we blame a person with whom we share no common history, or have no preexisting relations with? Recall that on Scanlon's view to decide that a person is blameworthy is to see his or her action as displaying something about that person, that impairs the relations that others can have with him or her. To actually blame a person is to make the modifications in your relations with that person that the impairment makes appropriate. In the case of friendship, it is fairly clear to see what there is that can be modified, given that this relation is constitutive of such a wide range of intentions and dispositions that one is expected to have towards a friend. We can then see how in conditional relationships there already exists a variety of formed attitudes and intentions, which are capable of being dropped or suspended, given the significance that the impairment has for

⁷¹ To be sure, one would have to distinguish whether the person was acting out of a fault in their character, versus a lack of regard for a certain person. So if someone is late because they are bad at tracking the time, *or* if they are late because they do not feel that it should matter much to be late in meeting this particular person.

the person. To be friends with a person presupposes that the attitudes and intentions which grounds this relation are already present.

When we turn to the case of strangers, or other individuals with whom we have limited interactions, it becomes more difficult to see what exists that can be impaired, and so what room there is to blame such individuals on Scanlon's account. The question is whether we hold any relations with these individuals, where, like friendship, there exists intentions and attitudes that are capable of being both impaired and modified. To again use friendship as an analogy, we can see what changes there are to be made going forward in one's relations with that person: one might be less willing to confide in them, not put as much stock in the things that he or she says, and so on. Such revisions mark changes in one's relations with that person, and therefore count as blame on Scanlon's account. The problem with regards to blaming individuals that are strangers is that it is not clear what change could be made going forward in our relations with that person, so as to count as blame.

Scanlon's claim is that we do in fact hold relations with people that we do not know, and this is what he refers to as the default "moral relationship".⁷² The moral relationship is a normative ideal, like friendship, that specifies certain expectations, intentions and attitudes which follow "simply in virtue of the fact that we stand in the relation of "fellow human beings"". ⁷³ Even in the absence of any actively formed intentions and attitudes that we have towards particular individuals, there remains, towards *all* individuals, expectations, intentions, and attitudes that we ought to have of

⁷² Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 139.

⁷³ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 140.

them, and towards them, in the ways we act towards one another.⁷⁴ This relationship holds simply by virtue of certain facts being true about us: that we are rational agents that stand in relation to each other. It is therefore not a necessary condition of all relationships that the parties who stand in this relation have developed particular attitudes and intentions towards one another. Scanlon offers the example of the relationship that exists between parents and their children, which similarly holds simply because of the fact that one stands in the relation of being a parent to his or her children.⁷⁵ There are normative expectations, intentions and attitudes that a person ought to live up to because he or she is a parent, and this is true independent of any conditional attitudes or intentions that one may or may not have towards his or her children.⁷⁶ The same is true of the moral relationship: the fact that we are rational agents that stand in relation to one another means that normative standards apply in the ways that we decide to govern ourselves towards each other.

What, then, are the normative expectations, intentions and attitudes that make up of the moral relationship? In the ways that we act towards others, we ought to have intentions not to “harm those to whom we stand in this relation, to help them when we can easily do so, not to lie to them or mislead them...”⁷⁷ Again, holding these intentions means being inclined to actually act in these ways when one can, not just to theoretically

⁷⁴ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 139.

⁷⁵ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 139.

⁷⁶ Consider the character Noah Joad from John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. In chapter 18 he says, “You know how it is, Tom. You know how the folks are nice to me. But they don’t really care for me”. I think it is plausible to interpret this as saying that the parents do not hold certain conditional attitudes towards their son Noah, like feelings of fondness or solidarity by sharing similar sensibilities or motivations, though they meet required, parental obligations.

⁷⁷ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 140.

endorse such intentions. If I witness a stranger has dropped her wallet, and I am in a position where I can hand it back to her, then this means that I should actually do so, not just think that it would be good for me to do so. If, moreover, in handing back her wallet, I am moved not by the reasons that there are to help this individual, but because I think that this act will reflect positively on me to the other onlookers, then this fact about me and the meaning of my action illuminates a moral deficiency in my relations with others, even if the action is itself permissible.

Holding good moral relations with others also means being inclined to have other attitudes. We should be glad to hear when things are going well for others. Conversely, it would be a moral failing if we considered it a good thing, or took pleasure in the misfortunes of others.⁷⁸ These expectations, intentions and attitudes ground what Scanlon calls the moral relationship, which encompasses “the kind of mutual concern that, ideally, we all have toward other rational beings.”⁷⁹ Like the standards that are set by friendship, it is these standards relative to which we can judge whether there exists an impairment in one’s moral relations with others.

A person’s failure to comply with the normative expectations set by the moral relationship is significant in its normative implications because it expresses that this person does not view us in that same way – as being owed the basic regard in his or her actions towards us, which flows from standing in the relation of rational agents to one another. Such failures to respond to the considerations that make up of the moral relationship impairs the basic relations that he or she is capable of having with others.

⁷⁸ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 140.

⁷⁹ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 140.

What is much less clear, in such cases, is how a person should respond to the impairment, in the way that the impairment makes appropriate. Unlike friendship, Scanlon concedes that these individuals do not forfeit their basic moral claims, despite their not having displayed this basic form of regard in their actions towards others. Such blameworthy individuals are still in possession of their claims, “not to be hurt or killed, to be helped when they are in dire need, and to have us honor promises we have made to them.”⁸⁰

Since individuals who have displayed deficiencies in their moral relations with others still hold claims on us not to be treated in certain ways, what room are we left with insofar as modifying our intentions and attitudes towards these individuals? It is important to keep in mind that what Scanlon is referring to as the moral relationship is a normative ideal: the expectations which *ideally* we will live up to in the ways we go about behaving towards one another. There are still ways where we can modify our moral relations with others so that we hold attitudes towards them that are different from those we would ideally hold, which nevertheless leaves their most basic moral claims untouched.

To start, we might experience the onset of a reactive emotion or some other attitude, like moral criticism or disavowal.⁸¹ Scanlon concedes that such emotions and other attitudinal shifts are surely a part of blame, but that “an account of blame that focused only on these elements would be too thin.”⁸² Changes in our other attitudes and intentions are also called for given such impairments. It is instructive here to consider an example where we would judge a stranger to be blameworthy. Suppose that it is Black

⁸⁰ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 142.

⁸¹ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 143.

⁸² Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 143.

Friday, and that I am bustling along with the rest of the crowd towards the discounted items, when the individual directly behind me tramples over me in an effort to get to the discounted items first. In our critical assessment of this person, we can say that he prioritized his aim of reaching the discounted items, and disregarded the claim that I have not to be harmed by his actions towards me. The fact then that he would be harming someone did not factor in as a sufficient reason for him to count against his acting in this way. To conclude that he is blameworthy would be for me to confirm that his action displays attitudes towards me that impairs the relations that I can have with him.

To actually blame this person, however, there must be some change going forward in my relations with him. The problem that arises insofar as being able to blame him, is whether there exists an opportunity for me to blame him, given how it is unlikely that we should ever interact. In cases where the possibility of ever interacting with the blameworthy person is very limited, this will affect the kind of content that the blame will have for us. Let us suppose that in this case there does exist an opportunity for me to interact with the blameworthy person; what revisions are there to be made then? The changes I can make in my intentions, for example, could be that where normally I would go out of my way to offer someone a hand, I would not form any intention to do so towards this person, so long as he was not in dire need. If he were to drop an item at the checkout aisle, I would not feel inclined to help pick it up, or if he left his cellular phone on the counter, I would not feel obligated to return it to him; though I should not stop someone else from doing so.

I can also curb or modify any intention to further associate with this person. With healthy moral relations, the possibility of developing further relations with such

individuals is not immediately ruled out: I can consider such individuals as eligible to be future acquaintances, friends, or associates of some other kind. In cases of impaired moral relations I can justifiably revoke any standing intention to form any further conditional relationship. It is appropriate, in fact, that I do consider this person as ineligible to form any further relations with, since “friendship and the other specific relationships ... presuppose adequate moral relations”.⁸³ To be clear as to how this sort of a revision marks a change within the regular range of moral relations, consider what removing such intentions would mean in the absence of any impairment in the moral relationship. If I simply viewed someone as not being the right sort of candidate to form any further association with, despite the fact that the person had done nothing that could justify my viewing them in this way, then this would ultimately be a kind of prejudicial or discriminatory attitude on my part. I would be abrogating an intention that exists in the normal moral relation for reasons that are not justified, given that no impairment in the relation had been made, and so doing so would be a form of discrimination.

It is also appropriate in cases of impaired moral relations that one withholds certain feelings and attitudes towards this person. With regards to the person that trampled over me, I can hope that he does not end up with the discounted item; I might also harbor more general feelings of ill will towards him. Again, where normally harboring these feelings would be abnormal or perverse, such impairments can make holding these feelings and attitudes appropriate.⁸⁴

⁸³ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 143.

⁸⁴ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 144.

These are the kinds of modifications that a person can make in his or her relations with a stranger that the person has judged to be blameworthy, and so would count as an instance of blame. Strangers also include, however, not just the people we come into contact with on the streets, or while shopping for groceries, but also the people that live on the other side of the world, or that we read about in the papers. The potential to come into contact with these individuals is therefore much more unlikely, given the physical distance that exists between such strangers. But what could we say with regards to blaming these types of strangers on Scanlon's account? It is clear that we would at least be able to form judgments of blameworthiness about these individuals, if we were to become aware of them, and had knowledge of their actions which manifested attitudes of impaired relations. But, again, if blame requires a change in *our* relations with that person, then it would seem increasingly more difficult to blame a person the further they are, and if their action was not itself directed at us.

Let us suppose, for example, that I was not the one trampled on during the Black Friday sale, but that I read about this happening to someone else in the paper. The fact that I am not the victim of this person's action affects the content that the blame will have *for me*. Here, because I mostly lack the opportunity to interact with this person, I do not need to decide how I will behave towards this person in the future, or be concerned with discerning what meaning this interaction will have for me.⁸⁵ To that extent, reading a story in the paper where I judge that a person is blameworthy need not require *me* to revise my intentions, because it is not relevant why I would have reason to do so; other than if I were to consider certain counterfactuals where I would be interacting with this

⁸⁵ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 146.

person.⁸⁶ Scanlon's point becomes more apparent when we consider blaming historical figures with whom we hold no relations with whatsoever. For example, it would seem peculiar to say that *I blame* the Roman Emperor Nero for matricide. We can criticize Nero, or think negatively of him; but to say that we blame him would start running the risk of triviality, where the attitudes that are involved in blame begin looking like mere moral grading.

Under Scanlon's conception of blame, the significance of the impairment is strongest when the person that we are blaming is someone that we are close to. There are several reasons for why this is. First, the people we are closest to play a more significant role in our lives: we demand more of a regard in the attitudes that are displayed by our friends, family members, and partners, than from a stranger walking down the street. It is therefore more likely to have a greater effect on our lives, and on our relations with this person, when someone we are closer to displays attitudes of impaired relations, because the demand on them to hold a certain kind of regard for us is greater.⁸⁷ Since the actual content of these more developed relationships is itself more substantial, there will then be more that is called for in order to be revised when there has been an impairment. The content of blame on Scanlon's account is attuned to the significance that the impairment

⁸⁶ This is to say that we might form hypothetical modifications in our intentions, should the opportunity to interact with this person arise. The question that could be posed is whether forming such hypothetical modifications in our intentions is itself a modification that could count as blame. As I discuss, the answer to this becomes more apparent when we consider blaming agents, like historical figures, that bear no relevance whatsoever on our lives.

⁸⁷ To be sure, by the way this affects our lives, I mean in its normative implications for our relations with this person; not necessarily some tangible effect that their action had.

has for one's relations with that person, given the victim's relation to the blameworthy person.

A second point is that the meaning of our interactions with a person is much clearer in cases where we are familiar with the person's character, and their patterns of behavior. It can be much more difficult to discern the meaning of a one-off interaction with a stranger, when I have no awareness of the person's character or what their state of mind is like. If I am walking down the street and someone comes up to me and knocks off my hat, while I could blame the person, this might instead just raise a question about that person and their state of mind. It would be difficult to tell here whether the person genuinely harbors attitudes that would impair his or her relations with others, or if he or she is simply disoriented.

The extent to which it is important then that we blame strangers depends on whether we expect to have future interactions with the person that is blameworthy. Recall that these are not purely prudential or experiential concerns; the concern rather is with one's being able to understand his or her relations with another person, and being able to come to terms with the actual intentions and attitudes that make up of that relationship. Being able to make sense of, and come to terms with one's relation with another person is most significant when that relation is to some extent ongoing, because that person then plays some role in the other's life. This is why on Scanlon's account, blame in the case of strangers is attenuated, because there is less in the relationship that will need to be revised in the face of an impairment, and so the sorts of attitudes that are involved in this sort of blame will be fewer.

While the attitudes involved in blaming strangers are fewer than that of most conditional relationships, an impairment that occurs in the moral relationship is nevertheless unique in that it holds implications for everyone's relations with that person. In conditional relationships, impairments are made to conditional attitudes and intentions, which are not owed to everyone, and the action which manifests the impairment is targeted towards a particular person, not towards persons in general. Impairments made in the moral relationship are different in that they demonstrate a person's violation of the considerations that are owed to others unconditionally; and such violations are expressive of this person's attitudes towards people in general, not just a particular person.⁸⁸ Because of this, impairments that are made in the moral relationship generate reasons for us all to see ourselves as being separated from this person, because this person does not have the same kind of regard for us, that follows from being a person. This ascribes the considerations that make up of the moral relationship with a kind of priority and importance that is not assigned to other conditional relationships, and are therefore included only in the implications that impairments in the moral relationship have.^{89 90}

To be sure, if, in a friendship, a person displays attitudes towards their friend that goes against what it means to stand in the relation of friends, we can usually still count on him or her not holding attitudes that would go against seeing the purported friend as a person. In fact, if my friend acts towards others in ways that reveal deficiencies in his or

⁸⁸ Supposing that the perpetrator is not targeting any particular group in acting, like a certain sex or minority.

⁸⁹ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 158-60.

⁹⁰ Violations made between friends can also violate the considerations set by the moral relation; but violations in the moral relationship presuppose a violation of any other conditional relationship.

her moral attitudes towards them, then this should be unnerving *for me* since the only considerations that are preventing him or her from treating me in this way is that he or she holds certain conditional attitudes towards me, like we have a similar sense of humour or share the same interests.

So while blame that occurs in the moral relationship is often thinner in its content from that of conditional relationships – blaming strangers need not require us to figure out which intentions to revise, we do not need to be preoccupied with the meaning of these interactions – it is also incommensurable in its content. Severe deficiencies in a person’s moral attitudes towards others have far-reaching and encompassing implications for his or her relations with them; there would be hardly any relations that one could have with this person that would contain the relevant kind of meaning, since the person would not be acting from the reasons that there are to treat you as a friend, partner, or person. While the kind of blame that occurs in the moral relationship does not always leave indelible marks on our lives, it is the sort of blame that estranges us from others, given the severity of the impairment.

Chapter 5

Weighing Our Commitments

If we remember the argument from Chapter 2, where I claimed that Wallace's account depicts blame as occurring within a single, tight relation; and, to that extent, blame, on such an account, only amounts to *expressions* of blameworthiness, not actual responses to our judgments of blameworthiness. It was unclear, at that point, what I was referring to by 'responses to judgments of blameworthiness', and why this would be something we have reason to preserve over and above the expressions of blameworthiness that Wallace describes in his account. My intention, in the foregoing chapter, was to fill in this gap by appealing to Scanlon's account, which focuses precisely on the substantive content that constitutes our responses to judgments of blameworthiness in our inter-personal relations with others. Now we stand in a better position to evaluate what is entailed through a commitment to either view, and to that extent, what is at stake.

To recapitulate a key normative claim of Wallace's view: experiencing moral emotions matter because this shows that we care about our moral standards. Wallace argues that it follows from valuing that we be emotionally "exercised", in the relevant way, when something we value has been disregarded or ignored.⁹¹ To be in a reactive state then expresses the violation, while at the same time demonstrating that such violations affect us. But, when we reflect on our moral experience, it seems odd to suggest that *this* is what we have in mind in blame – that we blame others as a way of demonstrating our convictions to abstract moral principles.⁹² This strategy of appealing to

⁹¹ Wallace, "Dispassionate Opprobrium", 358.

a scheme of valuing in order to undergird the normative force of blame appears forced – it makes better sense to look at the features that are internal to the practice of blame, in order to assess its normative punch. In terms of its normative capacity, I find Wallace’s account to be unsatisfying, because it does not offer much in the way of the reasons that we have to care about blame.

When I say that Wallace’s account ‘does not offer much’, I mean this in a partly literal sense. The actual content of blame on Wallace’s account is limited to a purely attitudinal or emotional dimension. While I do not doubt that the realm of moral emotions is extraordinarily complex, varied, and layered in its own right, the moral emotions still do not exhaust or occupy all that exists in responding to considerations of blameworthiness. As we saw with Scanlon, there is still more substantive content that we ought to be responding in light of our judgments of blameworthiness, when we notice that such judgments are constituted by a recognition of the impaired intentions and dispositions that make up of a relationship. Partly, then, that the morally motivated person is not given much reason to care about blame on Wallace’s account is a consequence of the actual attitudes that are involved in this kind of blame being too narrow. Thus lending support to Scanlon’s claim, where he argues that such singular, attitudinal accounts of blame are too thin.⁹³

When we turn to Scanlon’s account we get a much more natural explanation for the reasons that there are to want to preserve the attitudes involved in blame, and to further view the availability of such attitudes as integral to our relations with others. This is because the reasons that we have to blame a person, on this account, are internal to the

⁹³ Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 143.

attitudes involved *in that* blame, given the significance of the impairment or judgment of blameworthiness. It therefore follows, on Scanlon's account, that to form and endorse a judgment of blameworthiness *calls for something to be done* in the light of that judgment.⁹⁴ When a person takes such judgments seriously, and follows through with blaming the person that he or she has judged to be blameworthy, this simply indicates that the agent was sensitive to the reasons that applied to him or her in that instance. To be sure, the attitudes in blame matter *to her*, because if a person that she holds relations with fails to recognize a claim that she has, given their relation to one another, then this affects the ways in which they will be able to relate to one another; so it is appropriate that one should be able to adjust her relationship to the actual attitudes and intentions that make up of that relationship.⁹⁵

The normative force of Scanlon's version of blame is therefore self-evident, since we need only appeal to what it is that we are doing in blaming a person, in order to understand the reasons that we have to blame that person. A further feature of Scanlon's

⁹⁴ Again, how far one is willing to go in taking that judgment seriously is a further question.

⁹⁵ It is also helpful to recognize the irrationality that is implied when a person fails to follow through to some extent with a judgment of blameworthiness. A person's failure to make the relevant modifications in his or her relations with others, means that he or she moves forward in his or her relations with that person on grounds that are false, and to do so willingly raises the question as to whether the agent is lacking in self-respect, or is being self-deceptive, or has something to gain by not following through with such judgments.⁹⁵ Think, for example, of an employee, who weighed the reasons for and against making modifications in his relationship with his employer, but opted not to in order to maintain a more amicable work environment. The point is that recognizing that a person fails to be rational in cases where he or she does not follow through with blaming a person in situations where he or she ought to, *just is* to recognize that we have reason to blame.

account, which has not yet been adequately addressed, is the extent to which his account incorporates Wallace's. The experience of moral emotions are part of Scanlon's understanding of blame. The emotions occupy a secure place, and are very much included in Scanlon's depiction of blame – they are simply not what is essential to it. Nevertheless, because his account does not place the emotions at the forefront, it has been accused of being too weak, or, as Susan Wolf phrases it, “blame for wusses” or “wimpy blame”⁹⁶; or, as Wallace argues, it “leaves the blame out of blame”.⁹⁶⁹⁷ Such accusations seem to me to be a mistake. There is no reason to think that just because there is no correlative emotion attached to a particular instance of blame, that the significance of what it is that we are doing is somehow attenuated, or has less of an impact on the agent or on the person being blamed. The significance that impairments can have, and the modifications that are called for, are anything but weak – even if the agent is not seized by a feeling of resentment or indignation. To realize that you were mistaken in thinking that a person held a certain kind of regard for you is a difficult realization to come to terms with, even if one manages to do so in a manner that is detached from emotion.⁹⁸ And to realize that a person had to re-evaluate and revise their relationship with you, because of one's own blameworthy conduct, is, likewise, not something to be taken lightly.

⁹⁶ Susan Wolf, “Blame, Italian Style”, 336.

⁹⁷ Wallace, “Dispassionate Opprobrium”, 349.

⁹⁸ If we remember the example I gave in Section II of Huck Finn: Huck was familiar with Tom's character, so when Tom acted as he did towards him, this may not have aroused any emotion within Huck, rather than simply reaffirm the negative conclusion of Tom's character and the reasons that there are for Huck to modify his relations with Tom.

I moreover take some of the ‘strength’ that Wolf and Wallace are alluding to, to be partly illusory. Terms like ‘resentment’ and ‘indignation’ include a rhetoric which serves to emphasize their strength (and no doubt they are powerful emotions), but they can also be fleeting, disorienting, and disproportionate.⁹⁹ Recall the discussion towards the end of Section I on irrational reactive states, such as irrational guilt and irrational resentment. This irrational aspect of the reactive states is what cornered Wallace into stating that they are “quasi-evaluative” emotions: that the reactive attitudes do not always conform to our rational deliberation. Yet, under Wallace’s depiction, we must depend on the presence of such partially rational emotions to be able to blame. Despite the rational content that is embedded in our active reactive states, I still claim that in a general sense, this renders us too passive in the face of blame. Whether or not we are able to blame a person for their blameworthy conduct is not something that should be outside of our control. These problematic features of the emotions give us sufficient reason to incorporate other attitudes into our conception of blame.

So far, I have been focussing on why we should be hesitant to accept an account that is purely emotional, like Wallace’s reactive account. The upshot of this discussion is that such accounts fail to adequately explain why blaming others is something we have reason to care about, because the content that is included in this kind of blame is too narrow. I further argued that Scanlon’s account is successful in this regard. It is important to note however the areas where Scanlon’s account faces its own difficulties. These problems are not so much substantive, as they concern certain areas of ambiguity within his account.

One possible concern has to do with our standing to form judgments of blameworthiness. Recall that a judgment of blameworthiness depends on the meaning of a person's action, which in turn hinges on the reasons that moved a person in so acting. There is then a clear epistemic burden to our being able to form such judgments, since the reasons that motivated a person in acting is a fact about him or her, which occupies their internal life. In ideal cases, we have good access to such information: when people are forthright about what motivated them to behave in a certain way, and their behaviour aligns with what they have reported to be the case. However, in the non-ideal cases, which are the cases that are more likely to crop up in situations where blame will be relevant, the reasons that motivated a person in acting can be concealed and inaccessible. People can be extremely deceptive and manipulative about their behaviour, and about what their genuine intentions are in acting.¹⁰⁰ The question in such cases is: how much evidence must we gather about any particular person in order to form our judgments of blameworthiness towards him or her?

Since the concern, on Scanlon's account, is with assessing a person's attitudes, any isolated action is helpful insofar as it is a marker for describing to us who that person really is. Thus the relevant shift in dealing with these sorts of cases will be to look at a more generalized pattern of behaviour, rather than any one particular act. Making this shift will satisfy the stringent demand that exists with regards to forming such judgments, and result in more substantive, comprehensive judgments. The implications of this are twofold. The first, which I have already discussed to some extent with respect to the

¹⁰⁰ Think of the multitude of fictional characters that exemplify such complicated and deceptive internal lives. Walter White from the television series *Breaking Bad* is especially illustrative of this.

moral relationship, is that it becomes increasingly difficult to blame individuals with whom we hold more limited relations. The less information we have in forming such judgments, the more of a leap we must take in the formation of our judgments of blameworthiness. The second implication is that the content of these judgments are less concerned with any particular act that a person has committed, but rather with what an act says about the *way that they are*. To blame a person for the way that they are, rather than for what it is that they have done, might strike some as counterintuitive to what it is that we are doing in blaming others. Certainly this is in tension with Wallace's account, which concedes that blame must have a propositional object; it must be blame *for* something.¹⁰¹ It may also seem unreasonably harsh or unfair to blame a person simply for the person that they are.

Let me speak to the concern on the subordinate status of particular acts, on Scanlon's account. To be sure, individual acts matter inasmuch as they serve as a proxy for telling us something about the way that that person really is. With regards to blaming a person, particular actions, on this account, are of instrumental value. A worry might be whether we can hold a person accountable for a particular action, if it is one that seems out of character or incongruous with what we know of that person.¹⁰² If a person that generally considers others in his or her actions, acts in a way which then disregards others, can we form a judgment of blameworthiness about this person, or will Scanlon claim that our grounds for forming such judgments are insufficient? The objection is, if we blame someone for the regard they display towards others, which tells us something

¹⁰¹ It could be argued that blaming a person for the way that they are still retains a propositional object. I can blame a person *for* being inconsiderate.

about who that person is, and if uncharacteristic behaviour does not reveal anything about who he or she is, then is he or she insulated from the responses of blame in such cases? Given what we know of Scanlon's account, my conjecture is that such 'out of character' actions do not pose any problem, and, in fact, I find Scanlon's treatment of these incidents to be more plausible precisely *because* the focus is on a person's overall attitudes, rather than on an isolated incident.

For comparative purposes, consider how Wallace's account would handle such one-off occurrences.¹⁰³ The reactive account says that so long as there has been a violation in a moral obligation, and the person that has been wronged is in a reactive state and is disposed to some sanctioning response, this means the person that is blameworthy is being subject to blame. We need not ask any further question about who this person is, or how his or her conduct stands in relation to the ways in which he or she normally acts. Scanlon's account, on the other hand, would plug in this incident with the rest of what we know about this person. We might say that the person, in acting as he did, under those circumstances, revealed a part of his character; or we might alternatively withhold making such judgments until we get a better sense of how this action figures in with the rest of his behaviour.

Remember that the significance that is attached to such actions in part depends on the victim's relation to the person that is blameworthy; and that the victim has discretion in deciding whether or not to forego forming a judgment of blameworthiness. He or she might not take the person's blameworthy conduct to be an accurate indicator of the actual

¹⁰³ Both accounts will of course be open to the available excuses that a person might have with regards to their behaviour. Say, for example, a person was under unusual stress.

attitudes that this person harbors towards him or her, or the victim can conclude that the person's behaviour, albeit it is being out of character, is nevertheless informative of who this person is and the regard he or she holds towards him or her. As this discussion has shown, arriving at a judgment of blameworthiness is not a straightforward matter because the cases themselves are complex and differ from each other.

Finally, I want to reiterate Scanlon's rationale for focussing on a person's deficient attitudes that he or she holds towards others, in his or her relations with them. Focussing on a person's attitudes tells us about his or her willingness to behave in certain ways towards others. When we learn about the way a person operates, in the kinds of reasons that they recognize and are responsive to, we gain a sense of the ways in which they would be willing to treat others, and so we need not rely on particular incidents or actions to point out what we already know of this person, through an understanding of the attitudes he or she harbors. Say that a person is selfish, but puts in a concerted effort to not treat others in ways which would unearth her selfishness. In such a case, there might not be much in the way of concrete actions in forming a judgment of blameworthiness, so much as a subtler recognition of how she conducts herself in certain situations.¹⁰⁴ For example, one can recognize how reluctant she is in making compromises with her friends, or notice that if something is a slight inconvenience to her, it appears to burden her inordinately.¹⁰⁵ Her failure to respond to a component of the reasons that apply to her, given that she stands in the relation of friends towards others, is what makes her attitudes

¹⁰⁴ Think of Aristotle's view that the virtuous person does not struggle in their being virtuous.

¹⁰⁵ This might in itself be a kind of action. Though we would need to make a distinction here between actions and reactions.

defective.¹⁰⁶ What this example illustrates however is that the more we know of a person's general character, the less we need to rely on any one particular act to form our judgments of blameworthiness. The move to a more general pattern of behaviour is important because it colours in the content of our judgments of blameworthiness. While it might initially be unintuitive that blameworthiness is assigned to a person's deficient attitudes towards others, this begins to make sense when we understand how the content of their attitudes is what determines the ways in which one would be willing to treat others, and so tells us something substantive about who that person is. It is still true of this discussion, that there are areas of Scanlon's account which give rise to confusion. Such areas need to be seen to and clarified, in order to understand what we would be subscribed to, if we were to commit to this account.

¹⁰⁶ That is, it might be reciprocated out of a sense of obligation or self-restraint, but not from the other reasons which flow from friendship, like genuine concern or a desire to see your friends be happy.

Conclusion

In sum, a commitment to Wallace's conception of blame would both greatly attenuate the reasons that we have for blaming others, as well as minimize and distort the phenomenon that it is we are trying to describe. I discovered, in Section II, that Wallace's depiction amounts, at least, to an expression of a judgment of blameworthiness. I then went on to see if we should consider such expressions as either necessary or sufficient to count as instances of blame. In order to do so it was first necessary to understand what could be included in the separate responses to judgments of blameworthiness. With an understanding of Scanlon's account, which illustrates what might be included in such responses, it is clear that a commitment to Wallace's view comes at too high a cost: the reasons that we have to preserve the attitudes involved in blaming others are greatly reduced. I have further argued, against certain accusations, that Scanlon's account need not rely on the moral emotions to muster its strength; its strength consists in the reasons that there are to blame a person.

Finally, the phenomenon of blame is incredibly elusive and difficult to define, but because it is something we so often, and often unknowingly, do, we must continue to try to understand it. The small contribution I have tried to make in this thesis is to understand the role of the emotions in blame, with special reference to Wallace's reactive account. I have also argued that the aspects of blame that are neglected under Wallace's account are, for the most part, remedied by Scanlon's. It is my view that we would benefit greatly from continuing to develop and understand Scanlon's conception of blame, in order to better grasp this complex aspect of our moral experience.

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