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Colloquium in Legal, Political, and Social Philosophy

Conducted by
Liam Murphy and Samuel Scheffler

Speaker: **R. Jay Wallace, UC Berkeley**
Paper: **The Politics of Grievance and Other Pathologies of Influence**

Colloquium Website: http://www.law.nyu.edu/node/22315

To participants in the Halloween session of the 2024 NYU Colloquium:

The following text is part of a book project I am working on that carries the working title *Drawing Moral Lines: Resentment and the Deontic Structure of Social Life*. Here is some background information about the project that might be helpful as you read the draft I've circulated.

The book draws on two earlier books of mine. In *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Harvard 1994), I tried to develop a theme from P. F. Strawson's paper "Freedom and Resentment" about the significance of the reactive attitudes to our practice of holding each other accountable. The reactive attitudes include centrally, on my interpretation of them, resentment, indignation, and guilt—all of which have the character of angry disapprobation. My idea in this book was that to hold people accountable is to adopt toward them a stance in which we are disposed to react to their violation of moral expectations with these attitudes, and that we blame them when we are subject to one of these attitudes on account of what they have done. (I went on to argue that this framework helps to clarify what is at stake in traditional debates about the conditions of moral responsibility.)

In a later book, *The Moral Nexus* (Princeton 2019), I sketched and tried to defend a relational interpretation of the domain of interpersonal morality. The big idea here is that this domain is constituted by a set of directed obligations, specifying what we owe to other individuals insofar as they and we are equal members of the moral community. One of the themes in that book is that an account of interpersonal morality should make sense of the idea that moral requirements provide a reasonable basis for a practice of interpersonal accountability—though I left it open what such a practice might look like.

The new project tries to bring ideas from these two earlier books together. It offers an account of one form of interpersonal accountability in terms of the reactive attitudes of resentment, indignation, and guilt. I argue that these reactions are structured around essentially relational moral norms, and that this can help to illuminate some of their distinctive features.

Reactive blame, as I call it, is a response to the violation of directed moral requirements—to an action whereby one agent wrongs another—that involves one of the reactive attitudes. I do not contend that this is the only way to understand moral blame, which is a protean phenomenon that can be interpreted in different ways, involving different structured patterns of response to wrongful conduct. Nor do I maintain that there is a single constructive function that reactive blame can serve—like other forms of blame, it can be put to both good and bad uses. The aim, rather is to identify some constructive purposes that reactive blame can advance; to understand the features of it that contribute to its ability to serve those purposes; and to explain how those same features can lead us astray in our social relations.

There is a long tradition of philosophical skepticism about anger in its different forms. It is often portrayed as an essentially punitive emotion that constitutively includes a desire to inflict harm on its target. In the first part of this project I reject this idea, but argue that reactive blame nevertheless has an aversive, oppositional character that makes it an original source of friction in human relationships. It comes between the subject and the target of the attitude, in virtue of its dispositional profile and our susceptibility to the attitudes of others. I go on to argue that a syndrome of responses to wrongful conduct with these features has a potentially constructive role to play in ongoing relationships between people:

- It reflects our emotional investment in relationships that continue to matter to us (contrast Scanlon's "withdrawal" account of blame)
- It disposes the subject to behaviors through which wrongdoing is protested and the target is called on to account for their conduct
- It renders the norms that connect us to each other legible as requirements, imbuing our relationships with a kind of "deontic structure"

- It operationalizes the assertion of claims against other parties on the claimholder's own behalf, connecting to our sense that they have a kind of moral standing or dignity
- It connects to a narrative process of acknowledgment, apology, and amends, through which relationships impaired through wrongful conduct are potentially repaired

Reactive blame can also be understood to involve a social power that we have over each other. Its aversive character, enhanced or attenuated through exertions of expressive agency, are ways of influencing or incentivizing others to deal with interpersonal infractions that have now come between them. This is connected to the potential function of reactive blame to initiate processes of repair. But it is also a potential source of interpersonal pathology, which is the theme I discuss in the chapter I have made available for discussion.

Later parts of the book project discuss the management of reactive blame against the background of the pathologies to which it is susceptible. A theme here is that the regulation and eventual overcoming of reactive blame is largely effected through agential responses that are sensitive to moral and other reasons for action. In forgiveness, for instance, it is not so much that the emotions involved in reactive blame cease to be warranted or fitting; rather, the way reactive blame is taken up by the other party may mean that we have compelling practical reasons to overcome it or set it aside in our ongoing interactions with them.

A further topic is the character of reactive blame as a response to the "quality of will" that others take toward us. How can this idea be reconciled with the different point that we don't tend to blame people unless they have actually violated the requirements they owed to us? How can we explain, consistently with this aspect of reactive blame, its apparent sensitivity to moral outcome luck? Can phenomena such as this be accommodated by the relational interpretation of moral requirements, which connects them very tightly with the wrongs done to other parties when the requirements are flouted? (If what is repaired through apology and the making of amends is the wrong that was done to one party by another, then it seems that moral outcome luck might make a difference to the wrong that was done by two actions that violated the same requirement.)

R. Jay Wallace

The Politics of Grievance and Other Pathologies of Influence

By R. Jay Wallace, UC Berkeley

Reactive blame is a structured syndrome of responses to wrongful conduct that involves the Strawson-style reactive attitudes. In an earlier part of this project, I argue that it is an original source of social frictions that has a constructive role to play within the context of an ongoing relationships of value. It imbues those relationships with deontic structure, and it functions to put moral infractions within them on the agenda of the parties, as issues that need to be dealt with. It is also a source of social power, and therefore inherently fraught, giving individuals a tool that can easily be abused.

In this chapter, I explore some of the distinctive pathologies connected to the social power latent in reactive blame, which we need to understand before we can assess the prospects for overcoming them in our shared lives. One example is the politics of grievance that is salient in contemporary western societies, which invites a Nietzschean analysis. Another involves scripts that discount or deny the legitimacy of reactive blame when it is experienced by members of oppressed or marginalized communities. But is a morally defensible expression of this interpersonal power really possible? Social frictions might seem to introduce the wrong kind of reason for complying with relational moral expectations. I address this challenge in the concluding section of the chapter.

In the preceding chapters I have argued that reactive blame can be understood as a source of social power. Angry disapprobation is inherently aversive, in virtue of our susceptibility to the attitudes of others as well as the affective and behavioral profile of the reactive emotions. This opens up the possibility, through exertions of expressive and managerial agency, of influencing the conduct of other people, subjecting them to pressures that incentivize them to act in accordance with our wishes.

There is a large and difficult question about how the social power latent in our accountability practices can be reconciled with the ambition to recognize the standing of others as equal members of the moral community. Wherever it is present, social power can be abused to oppress and exploit and demean those at whom it is targeted, and this is as true of reactive blame as of more overt capacities to influence the behavior and attitudes of others. A massive philosophical literature has accumulated that is critical of angry emotions, featuring prolific and plausible examples of the malicious forms they can assume in our social lives. There is an understandable tendency to think that we would be better off without emotional formations that can be abused in these ways, and that we should therefore strive to replace reactive blame with less fraught systems of response to moral infractions.

I do not believe this to be a realistic aspiration. Human social life is shot through with the kinds of emotional dependencies and vulnerabilities that render us susceptible to the influence of others. Reactive

attitudes may be unusual in being original sources of social friction, but they are not unusual in being potential sources of emotional influence over others. Thus it is not surprising that the Stoic anxiety about anger should be part of a larger and to my mind quixotic project of achieving self-sufficiency, something that is not so much as attainable for individuals who stand in relations of attachment to other people or who care about things that are outside their ability to control. Moreover, when it comes to reactive blame the very oppositional features of it that generate anxiety are connected to its value within social relations structured through directed obligations and claims. Reactive blame has a positive role to play as a syndrome of response to the flouting of relational requirements, precisely in virtue of the features of it that are oppositional. It reflects an ongoing commitment to the importance of a relationship that has been impaired through the disregard of moral claims, and its affective and dispositional profiles dispose the subject to protest such relational infractions. In virtue of these features, reactive blame is especially well suited to initiate a communicative process that eventually repairs the relations that have been damaged through the agent's wrongful conduct—provided that it is taken up in the right manner.

Having said that, I also think it is important for a defense of reactive blame to acknowledge and understand the distinctive interpersonal hazards that are latent in the social power that it brings in its train. If we hope to realize a system of truly egalitarian accountability relations between individuals, we need to start by identifying and diagnosing some of the important obstacles that stand in the way of that goal. My aim in this chapter will be to explore a few selected pathologies of reactive blame through the lens of the relational account of it developed in earlier chapters, which will set the stage for a later discussion of the prospects for overcoming them in. This is of course a vast topic, and there is no realistic hope of treating it comprehensively in the compass of a single chapter. I shall focus on a few select examples of pathological reactive blame that are particularly salient in our current moment, as well as on cases that are of unusual theoretical interest. The aspiration will be to illuminate these problematic forms of accountability by drawing on two features of my approach to reactive blame. One is its inherently aversive or oppositional character; the other is its connection to relational norms that define what we owe to other moral persons.

I start, in section one, with some examples of what I call narcissistic reaction, including the politics of resentment that has become one of the dominant themes in contemporary democratic life. In section two, I turn to some pathologies of solidarity and reception; these involve deficiencies in the processes through which legitimate complaints are taken up by other members of the moral community. The concluding section discusses the important question of whether the social pressure that is inherent to our accountability practices can be reconciled with the moral ideal of recognizing others as autonomous individuals capable of norm-governed agency. The frictions of reactive blame might seem to generate the wrong kind of reason for complying with basic moral expectations; I try to show how their operations function within processes of repair to reorient the target of them toward the moral reasons that the original infraction disregarded.

1. Pathologies of Narcissistic Reaction.

The pathologies I wish to discuss in this chapter are problematic expressions of reactive blame, especially cases that attract specifically moral objections. I begin with some pathologies of reaction, in which the problematic dimensions of reactive blame lie on the side of the subject of reactive attitudes.

In thinking about pathologies of blame, it will be useful to begin with a paradigm of constructive blame that we can take as a point of reference and a standard of assessment. For this purpose the case of communicative blame, oriented toward repair, naturally suggests itself. This is the case discussed in Chapter Two, in which reactive blame is discursively addressed to the person it targets, and in a way that invites engagement about the grievance that it expresses.[1] I characterized this kind of interaction as the primary communicative context in which reactive blame has a valuable interpersonal function, and also as an interaction to which the behavioral profile of the reactive attitudes naturally disposes us. Reactive blame is essentially about the flouting of a directed requirement, a relational deficiency that needs to be acknowledged and addressed before the parties to it can move forward. Reactive blame, when discursively expressed, fits into a narrative process of repair that is an important resource for individuals whose social relations are structured in terms of a system of directed requirements.[2] Reactive blame

seems in good order when it belongs to a process of this kind, or is at least suited to initiate such a process. And it is pathological, by the same token, when it has features that preclude its incorporation into a communitive exchange that is oriented toward acknowledgement and repair.

One familiar class of cases in which reactive blame falls short of this standard involves manipulation. Consider the choleric boss who is constantly flying off the handle at subordinates and co-workers, yelling at them at the slightest provocation, throwing plates with unfinished hamburgers on them against the wall when things don't go as they might wish, and so on. There is a performative aspect to these expressions of anger on the part of the subject, a strategic deployment of reactive anger that consciously or subconsciously aims at reinforcing hierarchy and bending the social world to the subject's will. The social power that is latent in reactive blame is used strategically in these cases; the social frictions of reactive blame are mobilized in order to manipulate others into displays of deference or efforts to assuage the angry subject's sense of vulnerability or hurt.[3]

Anger that takes this form is clearly not in good order, judged by reference to our communicative paradigm. For one thing, it is not, in general, about a genuine grievance that it would so much as be possible for the target individual to address. In a typical case of choleric manipulation, the real problem may be something in the subject's own comportment; perhaps they purloined some classified documents when relocating from the White House to their private residence, or maybe they have failed to anticipate a new threat to the family media empire they preside over (call it "Waystar Royco"). But they act as if they are in trouble as a result of lapses on the part of their subordinates, lashing out at those individuals for having failed to avert the predicament that they now find themself in. Under these circumstances, there is no way for reactive blame to be taken up in a communicative process of acknowledgement and repair, because there is no real infraction on the part of the target that genuinely needs to be addressed. The aim of this pathology of reaction lies elsewhere, in the shifting of blame from the subject onto someone else, or in the sour satisfaction that the subject might derive from a demonstration of their capacity to compel subservient behavior from their subordinates or their children.[4]

Cases of this kind, involving manipulation and dominance, are familiar to all of us, and they clearly mobilize the power dimension that is endemic to reactive blame. From a theoretical standpoint, however, they are not especially interesting; the deficiencies they involve, relative to the ideal of a communicative process oriented to repair, are too obvious to require much analysis. It is otherwise, I think, with a pathology of reactive blame that has become a ubiquitous and pernicious theme in contemporary political relations. This is the politics of resentment and grievance, as we might call it. By this I have in mind the noteworthy fact that many citizens in contemporary democracies approach politics in a state of perpetual agitation. They are primed for anger and constitutionally susceptible to demagoguery that aims to get them riled up about things. Familiar sites for this tendency are the Trump rally and the Fox News evening program, but it is a much more widespread phenomenon. It is a ubiquitous feature of social media, for instance, whose algorithms, tuned as they are to generate engagement, famously end up promoting content that incites people to anger. It also underlies the strategy that leads political campaigns to bombard potential donors with hysterical texts and emails (preferably in all caps) about the outrages perpetrated by the opposition. People apparently pay attention to this stuff and respond accordingly; they take satisfaction in being made to feel indignant or resentful, and even seek out interactions that reliably generate these sentiments in them.

The propensities I have just summarized are well-known features of contemporary democratic cultures. But they are also pretty puzzling. If I am right in suggesting that we are primed for anger and prone to take satisfaction in interactions that provoke in us this reaction, it seems to me that there has to be an antecedent psychic need that anger tends to speak to. Some drive or instinct or deficiency must be latent in our psychology, which leads us (for instance) to be engaged by social media content that makes us feel angry toward someone. To make sense of the politics of grievance, then, we have to answer two questions. First, what is the antecedent need that is satisfied by anger, leading us to respond so predictably when opportunities for angry reaction are dangled before us? And second, how does anger meet this need? What exactly is the mechanism whereby we come to find peculiar satisfaction in getting riled up in the ways that have become such a ubiquitous part of contemporary political life?

Before proceeding to address these questions, I should acknowledge the limitations that confront any attempt to tackle them through philosophical reflection. Like other mass social phenomena, the politics of resentment is inherently complicated, liable to take different forms in different cases, and fed by a variety of disparate psychic tendencies and processes. It is also, of course, an empirical phenomenon, and any account of its origins needs to be consistent with historical, social, and psychological evidence that it is not the province of the philosopher to assemble. For all that, there is an interpretative aspect of the questions I am interested in that distinctively philosophical methods of investigation might be able to shed some light on. If nothing else, the philosopher can try to identify psychological tendencies that, if present in a subject, would make them primed to latch onto narratives of anger and grievance. If there is evidence that the specified tendencies are indeed widespread in the populations in which the politics of resentment has become entrenched, the philosophical account might succeed in helping us to make at least partial sense of it. That, at any rate, is the spirit in which I shall take up these issues—drawing on the account of reactive blame sketched in this volume.

Thinking about this contemporary phenomenon, it is natural—for philosophers and non-philosophers alike—to recall Nietzsche's discussion in the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, about the emergence of modern moral consciousness in what Nietzsche refers to as the slave revolt.[5] Here, for instance, is a short passage from Mark Danner's account of one of the Trump rallies he wrote about in 2020 for the *New York Review of Books*:

> The dynamic playing out before me was ancient: Already Nietzsche was calling it "*ressentiment*," and had he been transported to Freeland, Michigan the German philologist would have recognized instantly what he was seeing enacted before him, a kind of Mummers' revolt of the powerless…. Trump, the tribune of the powerless, the unmasker of the powerful, the denouncer, the insulter, the despoiler of idols—Trump was their "imaginary revenge."…. He was the artist of grievance….[6]

The echoes of Nietzsche in our modern populist politics of resentment are indeed striking. But they are not just on the surface. A closer look at Nietzsche's analysis of the slave revolt can, I think, shed light on

the two interpretative questions I have posed about the psychic need that is satisfied through encounters that stoke in us feelings of resentment and anger.

Nietzsche's story about the slave revolt begins with an emotional orientation that he attributes to the powerless masses in aristocratic, pre-Christian societies, that of *ressentiment*. I take this sentiment to be akin to envy, a hostile attitude that is felt by the powerless toward those who enjoy the advantages that are systematically denied to themselves.[7] Nietzsche suggests that this antagonistic orientation grows to monstrous proportions in the psyches of the dispossessed masses, until it becomes creative and gives birth to a new table of values (GM, secs. I.7, I.10). How exactly this process is to be understood is of course a matter of considerable scholarly controversy.[8] But the reading I favor emphasizes the intelligibility deficit that characterizes the outlook of the enslaved masses prior to the creation of a new table of values.[9] They are consumed with hatred and antagonism toward those in their community who occupy positions of aristocratic power and privilege. And yet these very individuals are held up as paragons of virtue and goodness by the prevailing scheme of values; they are proud, confident, magnanimous, and aware of their natural superiority. If these are understood to be admirable traits, however, then it hardly makes sense that the hatred of the masses should be focused so relentlessly on the nobility, since they are the very individuals who possess the virtues in the greatest degree.

Prior to the slave revolt, then, the dispossessed masses are consumed by an antagonistic emotional orientation toward the aristocratic elite that is inscrutable in terms of the prevailing table of values. This is the intelligibility deficit to which I referred, and it can be understood as an emotional need on the part of the subjects of Nietzschean *ressentiment*. They are dominated by their hatred for the privileged, but they lack an evaluative framework that would enable them to see their hatred as a fitting response to the individuals at whom it is targeted. The creative moment of the slave revolt, on my reading of it, should be understood against the background of this intelligibility deficit. What happens, according to my interpretation of Nietzsche's story, is that the dispossessed masses come to accept a new table of values because it satisfies their need to make sense of their emotional outlook. The new values enable them to see the aristocrats not as paragons of virtue but as vicious and even evil. Their magnanimity and

sense of superiority become the vice of pride, their self-sufficiency a form of callousness, and their willingness to assert themselves a haughty indifference to the interests of others. Interpreting the social world in these terms renders intelligible, for the first time, the all-consuming emotional orientation of the powerless. Their antagonism toward the aristocrats starts to make sense if the latter are really embodiments of vice. Who better to despise than individuals who are morally reprehensible to their core?[10]

This reading of the slave revolt situates it primarily within the psychic space of the dispossessed masses and their *ressentiment* toward the elite. The invention of the new table of values solves an emotional problem for these individuals, and that is where its real significance lies. Of course, Nietzsche himself emphasizes the genuine or intended effects of the slave revolt on the aristocratic elites, characterizing it as an act of spiritual revenge (cf. GM, sec. I.7). But I don't think we can understand the strategic aspect of the process to characterize the outlook of the individuals in whom the revolt takes place. A new table of values will be created only if those individuals themselves sincerely come to accept them, and sincere acceptance seems difficult to reconcile with the cynical goal of exacting strategic revenge on the elite. The main locus for strategic thinking in this process, on my interpretation of it, is in the role of the priestly aristocracy in fomenting the revolt (GM, secs. 1.7-1.8). The priests understand the psychic need that renders the masses susceptible to the new evaluative categories, and they propagate the new table of values in a deliberate attempt to create cultural conditions that will eventually lead to the demise of the natural aristocracy. They cynically preside over the slave revolt, but it actually takes place within the outlook of the masses, whose *ressentiment* becomes intelligible in terms of the scheme of good and evil that they sincerely latch onto.

When it comes to the contemporary politics of resentment, there is of course a clear analogue to Nietzsche's cynical priests in the populist demagogues who are masters at exploiting the psychic needs of their audience. These needs, on my reading of the situation, are also remarkably similar to the conditions that drive Nietzsche's slave revolt. They consist primarily in an intelligibility deficit that is linked to a prior orientation of hostility or antagonism toward the other. This orientation, extensively discussed under

the heading of "affective polarization"—can have multiple sources in the conditions of contemporary life. For the primarily rural and less educationally credentialed populations that seem to be particularly susceptible to right-wing demagoguery across many contemporary political cultures, there may be factors at work that are very like the situation that gave rise to Nietzschean *ressentiment* in his account of the slave revolt. Declining economic and demographic prospects naturally foster something like envy of the urbanized, coastal elite, who have profited from the economic prospects opened up by the globalized economy and whose preferences and tastes have come to dominate the popular culture that we all operate within. This is territory that has been widely studied and reflected on in recent years, in countless reports by journalists from heartland diners; in the analysis of American deaths of despair by economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton; in the sociologist Arlie Hochschild's empathetic account of "anger and mourning on the American right"; and in many other sources.[11]

But there is a more general cultural phenomenon that feeds affective polarization, I believe, which we might characterize in terms of negative group identity formation.[12] There is a natural human tendency, perhaps rooted in our evolutionary history, to define ourselves in part through our opposition to the other.[13] We do not need to go so far as Carl Schmitt, who took enmity to be the attitude that is constitutive of political membership in the first place;[14] it suffices that there is a deep proclivity to understand ourselves in these terms. When enmity connects to identity, however, it becomes an especially potent force, and it is one that is surely at work in communities that seem to have sorted themselves into mutually antagonistic tribes. The *ressentiment* of the rural populations who take themselves to have been left behind in contemporary liberal societies is an instance of this tendency, but it can be seen elsewhere in our social life, as well—for instance, in the widespread antagonism toward refugee populations in many affluent communities in Europe and North America; also in the bitter factionalism of left-wing politics in places like San Francisco, which pit liberals against self-styled progressives on issues such as housing, schools, and crime.[15]

If these observations are on the right track, then many citizens in contemporary democracies will be subject to antagonisms that are bound up with their sense of identity, and that are also evaluatively

inscrutable. Their enmity, after all, is not so much a response to a specific incident or set of circumstances as a marker and condition of group membership. We have in this situation another instance of the kind of emotional intelligibility deficit that was the driving force in Nietzsche's slave revolt (at least on my interpretation of it), which can again be understood to constitute a psychic need. In the present case, the emotional problem is not so much the lack of evaluative categories that could in principle be brought to bear on the objects of antagonism to explain why they might be worthy of contempt. There is a plurality of value concepts available in contemporary liberal societies, which can potentially be applied to just about anyone. The problem, rather, is that the pervasive antagonism is not really about anything in particular; its *raison d'etre* is its contribution to group identity formation, which means it is prior to any specific episode that might provide warrant for it. The subject of enmity, in other words, lacks a story about their relation to the object of their hatred that renders that orientation intelligible.

This is the psychological predicament that makes a lot of us primed for anger, in my diagnosis. But how exactly does the politics of resentment address this predicament? The primary mechanism, I would suggest, involves narratives of grievance and victimhood. People need to make sense of antagonism that is not really rooted in anything very concrete. So they latch onto narratives that paint the objects of their enmity in moralized terms, as individuals who have wronged or disrespected them in some way. The demagogues of the present moment are masters at generating content of this kind; it is the stock in trade of the Trump rally or the Tucker Carlson segment as well as the social media algorithm that selects for engagement, and the target audiences eat it up. Thus, coastal elites are constantly depicted as degenerate America haters who despise the cultural signifiers of the heartland citizens, including their guns, their religion, and their pickup trucks.[16] Economic migrants and refugees get demonized as "illegals" who refuse to play by the rules and who deliberately subject the rest of us to a wild spectrum of harms (terrorism, common criminality, exploitation of social programs, disease, pet eating, etc.). San Francisco progressives, meanwhile, depict local Yimby's as shills for rapacious developers, even when they are proposing to build low-income housing on a Nordstrom valet parking lot.

There is of course often a grain of truth to these narratives. Coastal elites generally do reject some heartland values; Barack Obama really did talk about how the rural population "clings" to their guns and religion; and Hillary Clinton apparently placed some Trump supporters in the notorious "basket of deplorables". The peculiar genius of Donald Trump remains his ability to turn the contempt in which he is genuinely held in many elite circles into contempt for his followers; through their visceral identification with him, the disdain of the traditional arbiters of taste gets transmogrified into disregard for them. But the remarkable thing is that these kernels of truth morph into larger narratives of grievance and victimhood that quickly become robustly detached from reality. Facts get totally twisted and distorted as they interact with the process of demagogic panic-mongering; it is taken as obvious that Clinton regards all Republicans as deplorables, even though she deployed that expression to distinguish the persuadable Trump supporters from the hard core who were probably out of reach for her (roughly, I take it, the group wearing the "Trump that bitch" t-shirts). An even more striking indication that it is not about truth or plausibility is the prevalence in our culture of grievance narratives that are practically delusional. The most salient and alarming example, of course, is the astonishing QAnon conspiracy theory, which I can hardly get my mind around, but which apparently depicts opponents of Trump as "a cabal of Satanic, cannibalistic sexual abusers of children" (to quote from the Wikipedia entry). But there are of course many other examples, such as the claims being made at the time these words were written (during the presidential election of 2024) that the government is engineering hurricanes to wreak havoc on Republican populations in the south or stealing disaster funds to enable migrants to live in luxury.

My hypothesis is that people would not latch onto stories of this kind unless they satisfied some deep psychic imperative. On the Nietzschean analysis I have proposed, the problem is that people orient themselves in the larger social world through antagonisms that are bound up with their conception of themselves, but that don't really make sense, since they are not concretely about anything in particular. Narratives of grievance and victimhood offer a solution to this predicament, giving subjects a way of understanding the target of their enmity as worthy of this attitude. They do this, moreover, by exploiting the relational deep structure of reactive blame, insofar as they identify specific (if implausible) wrongs

that were allegedly perpetrated by the other tribe against those who are antecedently disposed to hate them. If the coastal elites look down their noses at you and hold your values and practices in contempt, then you have a very good reason to be angry at them. Still more should you be against them if they are Satanic cannibals who are intent on trafficking and sexually abusing your children or geoengineering intense storms to ravage your community! Narratives of this kind make sense of the subject's antagonism toward the other, and in this way provide a remedy for the intelligibility deficit under which they suffer. But it is worth noting that they do not provide a remedy for the antagonism that gives rise to their predicament in the first place. On the contrary, enmity is apt to be intensified when it is refracted through the lens of the narratives that make sense of it—a perverse feedback loop of the kind Nietzsche himself delighted in uncovering.[17]

It is common to talk about the contemporary politics of resentment, and at a general level of resolution that is an apt description of the processes I have been discussing.[18] But it is also potentially misleading. It can suggest that populist movements give expression to resentments that are already present in the target populations, in response to genuine grievances they have about the economic and political developments that shape their lives. But the politics of resentment, as I understand it, is not a process that taps into a well of anger on the part of the masses that is already there. Rather, it itself is the thing that makes people angry and gets them riled up, transforming their enmity toward the other—their *ressentiment*—into an orientation that is recognizable as resentment. Antagonism turns into resentment when it is interpreted as a response to an identifiable wrong, and narratives of grievance are the machinery that effects this transition. They *create* the resentment that has rightly been thought to dominate populist political movements in the current moment, rather than being a response to a pre-existing and well-defined resentment.[19] And the process of creation is driven by the psychic need people feel to make sense of the prior enmity that they have constructed their identity around.

Furthermore, once this process is under way, there are secondary satisfactions that can be generated by it. Reactive anger is a source of social power, as we have seen, and it can be exhilarating to feel oneself in possession of a sentiment with this characteristic. In group settings, such as a rally or a

demonstration and even on social media, this can lead to a form of social contagion in which people feed off each other as they dwell collectively on the imagined grievances that are being peddled to them, and exult in the feeling that they are standing together in protest of them. There is also something perversely affirming about the process that transforms enmity into focused anger, insofar as it validates the subject's sense that they have the standing to assert moral claims on their own behalf. The claims that are asserted in these contexts might be preposterous in their content, but by giving their target audience personal grievances to be exercised about, the purveyors of these narratives flatter them, encouraging them to think of themselves as having a kind of moral dignity and agency within a social world that is structured through relational norms. Secondary satisfactions such as these help to sustain the politics of resentment, though they are parasitic on the more basic mechanism through which brute enmity is transformed into resentment, and in this way imbued with meaning.[20]

Resentment that is generated in this way clearly seems to me to be a pathology of reaction, relative to the ideal of a communicative exchange that is oriented toward repair. Like other forms of reactive blame, it mobilizes the latent social power we have over each other in virtue of our shared vulnerability to the social pressures generated by aversive attitudes. But this deployment of blame is fundamentally narcissistic, and therefore virtually impossible to engage; its meaning and logic lie in the consolations that it affords to the subject rather than in any genuine relational deficiency to which it might be a response. Even if the targets of an attitude like this are disposed to respond to it constructively, it is very hard to know what they are supposed to do about it.[21] The complaints that this anger addresses are not legitimate, and even if there is a grain of truth in them, acknowledgment and apology would only serve as surfaces onto which new manufactured grievances are projected. The most constructive response might be to attempt to identify and address significant wrongs that have in fact been visited on the subjects who are currently consumed with anger, treating those as the offenses that their resentment is actually about. Many of their communities have in fact been ravaged by the tides of modern capitalism, after all, as well as by an opioid crisis that was engineered by the pharmaceutical industry to generate obscene profits—to take just two of the standard examples that people hit on in this spirit.[22]

I am at a loss, myself, to think of a better way than this of dealing with the politics of resentment; it at least starts from a place of charity toward the subjects of resentment, and it has the potential to lead to policies that ameliorate genuine injustices. It is a somewhat patronizing strategy, however, since it doesn't take at face value the complaints that are actually being expressed by the adult individuals who are riled up against the elites.[23] Nor is it apt to be very effective as a response to that manufactured anger; insofar as the significance of this attitude lies in its relation to the psychic needs of the subject, it is not really amenable to the usual techniques of relational repair.[24] An effective remedy would need to disarm the processes of negative group identity formation that render people susceptible to narratives of imagined victimhood in the first place.[25] We should treat the politics of grievance not as a normal manifestation of resentment, but as a symptom of a deeper problem that requires a different kind of solution, outside the paradigmatic dynamics of reactive blame.

2. Pathologies of Solidarity and Reception.

In the previous section I talked about some pathologies of reactive blame on the side of subjects who are the victim of a (real or imagined) injury. But there are also noteworthy pathologies on the side of other members of the moral community.

One of these involves what we might call third-party blame. By this I mean the kind of indignation that is in principle available to any member of the moral community in response to a moral infraction that has occurred within it. On some approaches, including accounts that are widely understood to incorporate relational elements, this kind of reaction is in fact paradigmatic of blame. Moral obligations are demands that are suited by their nature to be addressed to agents by any representative member of the moral community, acting on the "de jure" authority they have to speak for all of us.[26] Addressing demands is in turn understood "second-personally", as a matter of holding individuals morally to account for their compliance or lack of compliance with the obligation that is addressed. The paradigmatic reactive expression of blame, on this approach, is not resentment but impersonal indignation, the

opprobrium that might be directed by any of us against someone who has violated the requirements that bind us all.

My relational approach offers a different way of thinking about the paradigmatic case of reactive blame. The norms around which reactive blame are organized, on this approach, are directed obligations that specify what one individual owes to others. The flouting of such relational norms has special significance for the parties to whom moral obligations are specifically owed, wronging those parties in particular and giving them a privileged basis for complaint. As we have seen, someone who is in this position has warrant for resentment toward the agent of the infraction, and responding with this refinement of angry disapprobation can be understood as a way of asserting claims on their own behalf. The primary site of reactive blame, as I earlier noted, is thus the nexus between the agent and the individual to whom their directed obligations are owed. The ritualized processes of repair that may be set in motion by the communicative expression of resentment likewise incorporate positional features that are tailored to this relational context. For instance, apology is understood to be owed by the wrongdoer to the injured party rather than to the moral community at large, in a way that acknowledges that they have a privileged basis for complaint about the infraction. Similarly, the power to offer forgiveness is the discretionary possession of the same injured individual; it is a mechanism that enables the injured party to set aside the wrong and restore normal relations with the wrongdoer, not something that is available to be bestowed by uninvolved third parties.[27]

There is scope for third-party blame according to this approach; but as I explained in Chapter Two it is naturally understood to have a vicarious character. The indignation of the third party is parasitic on the complaint of the individual who has suffered a moral injury or wrong, and it can be understood as a way of asserting the injured person's claim on their behalf. The third party is thus not someone who is authorized to hold individuals accountable as the agent of the moral community at large, nor is the addressing of obligations by third parties the paradigm for a practice of accountability. Reactive blame is embedded within a structure of relational requirements, and that is reflected in our understanding of the primacy of resentment vis-à-vis indignation. A further reflection of this is that indignation does not

automatically make sense in response to wrongful conduct, but depends in part on the relation that the third party stands in to the victim of wrongdoing. It is intelligible that any random third party could feel vicarious anger on behalf of the individual who is wronged in a given case. But it is generally fitting for the third party to be indignant only if special relational circumstances obtain. The third party might be a friend or close relative of the victim, or have been authorized by the victim to speak for them. In other cases involving clear and egregious infractions, solidarity with the victim might call for all of us to stand up for the victim (or at least all of us who share some local community with the victim).[28]

These same points about the relational structure of accountability can shed light on an interesting class of cases in which blame is subject to moral objections, which we might call pathologies of solidarity. The cases are ones in which third party blame goes astray on account of the attitude that the subject of blame displays toward the victim of the infraction. A currently popular framing for these problem cases involves the idea of centering. Third party blame seems problematic when the subject of it centers themselves in their addressing of demands, rather than the true victim. This de-centering of the true victim can take a variety of forms. A third party might "make it about themselves" by using the occasion of the transgression to flaunt their own upstanding moral character. They self-righteously position themselves at the front of the protest march and take unseemly satisfaction in having an opportunity to demonstrate that they are on the right side of the struggle. These forms of moral grandstanding or virtue-signaling are especially prevalent features of reactive discourse on contemporary social media platforms.

A different case is that in which the third party presumes to speak for the victim, but without bothering to consult them or to listen carefully to their point of view. There is an insidious assumption here that the true victim of injustice is not able to speak for themselves, or that the third party has superior insight into the nature of a wrong that doesn't even affect them directly. Then there are situations in which the third party takes the lead in protesting the infraction, in a way that leaves no space for the agency of the victim. The putative allies position themselves as a kind of savior, defending the rights and

claims of individuals who are taken to be incapable of defending themselves. We can think of these as situations that center the third party's virtue, their voice, and their agency.[29]

These are unquestionably pathologies of reactive influence. But what is problematic about them comes into clear focus only against the background of the relational structure of our accountability practices. If third-party indignation is taken to be the paradigmatic expression of moral blame, then each of us should equally be authorized to assert moral demands on behalf of the entire moral community, in our guise as its representative. There are no asymmetries of grievance or complaint that are built into our accountability practices at the ground level; but then it becomes obscure why it should be presumptively problematic or fraught when unaffected third parties take it upon themselves to address moral demands to wrongdoers on our collective behalf. They are speaking for all of us, after all, not specifically for the parties who have suffered the injury. Granted, it is consistent with this story that our practices of accountability might have developed in ways that incorporate conventions of deference toward those who have been harmed by violations of the requirements that bind us all. But there is nothing in the nature of third-party blame that would make such conventions presumptively reasonable or correct.[30]

Things look very different if we accept the relational interpretation of accountability for which I have been advocating. According to that approach, moral infractions give rise to privileged grievances on the part of those whom they wrong, which connect to the claims those parties hold against the agent of the wrongful conduct. Third-party blame is possible within this framework, but it is also essentially vicarious: the asserting of a claim held by another individual on their own behalf. Acting vicariously on another's behalf, however, is a project that is inherently a source of special responsibilities.[31] There is, first, the question of whether you should be speaking for the injured party in the first place. This might make sense, if for instance you stand in a special relationship to the victim and they aren't able to speak for themselves, or if they have asked you to step in as an ally in opposing the wrongdoer. But in the absence of such special reasons, it will probably seem presumptuous or meddlesome for you to take a stand on what went on between the agent and their victim. It might not really be your business. Furthermore, even when there is reason to assert claims on behalf of the injured party, you will owe it to the victim to exert

such influence as you have in ways that support rather than undermine their own standing and authority. You have to center their voice and their agency in your efforts at solidarity and allyship, and it is definitely not okay to use the occasion to show off about your own superior virtue and moral insight. Failure to live up to these standards will generally reflect a lack of regard for the individual you are asserting claims on behalf of, something that gives them a new basis for resenting you.[32]

Finally, there are pathologies on the side of the targets of reactive blame, the putative wrongdoers at whom exertions of social influence are targeted. I have suggested that we might think about these exertions in terms of interpersonal power; but power of this kind, as an essentially social phenomenon, is to some extent also socially constructed. It is present only to the extent its target registers the attitudes that it mobilizes and experiences them as aversive. In the first lecture I suggested that we have some natural tendencies to respond to anger in these ways, but I also noted that there are natural exceptions, including the narcissist who welcomes the attention of others, however it is valenced and expressed. But even if one is not a narcissist of this kind, one's susceptibility to the angry disapprobation of others might be attenuated by its interaction with background inequalities of resources and opportunities. Someone with a sufficiently vast fortune might be able to retreat into a private refuge into which expressions of reactive blame barely penetrate, which would perhaps provide some degree of immunity from their influence.[33]

It is often observed that there are different culturally-inflected scripts for making sense of emotions, and that these scripts can shape the attitudes themselves, making of them one thing rather than another.[34] These scripts affect how the subjects of reactive attitudes understand them, but they also affect how they are interpreted by other individuals, including those who are their proper targets. And it is noteworthy that some of the scripts that take hold, especially under conditions of oppression and injustice, reinforce social inequalities in troubling ways. Two familiar examples of this phenomenon are the scripts that presumptively deny the legitimacy of reactive anger when its subject is a Black individual or a woman. Thus there is the interpretive lens that leads people to see the anger of Black men as a disruptive and essentially irrational interpersonal force, rather than as a permissible way of addressing complaints to agents who have engaged in wrongful conduct. The prevalence of this interpretive script provides the

background to the recurrent Comedy Central skits in which Keegan-Michael Key played the role of Luther, President Obama's anger translator. The obvious premise in these scenes is that Obama, as a Black American male, is not really allowed to call on the resources of reactive blame in response to ordinary injuries and infractions, but can only allude to them in language that is buttoned up and affectless. Hence the need for a translator of the anger that Obama himself is unable to express—though it is a further comic theme that Luther's vicarious performance of presidential anger is florid and out of control, which draws on the same script that forces Obama to repress his anger in the first place. Anger is represented as a source of social power in this interpretive framework, but treated as untethered from the kinds of reasoned complaints that might be acknowledged to be a basis for discursive exchange.

The result of this script is to write Black males out of the shared story of who is entitled to assert moral claims on their own behalf, interpersonally. This is an egregious recognitional failure in itself, and one that serves to perpetuate existing injustices and to prevent the victims of them from deploying the most basic mechanism available to us for identifying moral injuries and insisting that they be dealt with. There is a similar entrenched script for interpreting the reactive attitudes of women, that which dismisses their anger as a symptom of hysteria. This interpretive lens is similar in its operations to the script for Black male anger: the reactive attitudes of women are recognized to be potentially forms of power or social leverage, but exertions of this power are taken to operate outside the parameters of rational intelligibility. They are read as ungovernable forces to be managed clinically, but not as sincere communicative gambits that might be engaged with on their own terms. Women to whom this script is applied are not really treated as autonomous members of the moral community, individuals with claims against the rest of us that they are authorized to address in their own person.[35]

The prevalence of scripts of this kind amounts to a pathology of reception within our accountability practices. It is a way of denying the equal standing of historically vulnerable and oppressed members of the moral community; in failing to register their reactive blame as presumptively legitimate, we in effect denigrate the dignity of women and Black men. They are debarred from entering the space of social relations defined by the reactive attitudes, insofar as the targets of those attitudes do not respond

within the Strawsonian participant stance, but deal with these attitudes objectively, as pressures to be managed and contained. This is clearly problematic, judged by reference to our ideal of a communicative exchange that is oriented towards repair. There is no prospect of constructive communicative engagement if reactive blame is not regarded as a potentially legitimate move in the first place, and the exclusion of historically disadvantaged populations from these mechanisms of repair obviously and crassly serves to perpetuate oppression.

What would an improved set of practices of reception look like? In one way, I think, it would exhibit the opposite polarity to that which is latent in the exclusionary scripts I have been discussing. Those scripts write off the reactive blame of members of salient disadvantaged groups as presumptively illegitimate. A better approach would clearly be to presume that the complaints of vulnerable individuals are plausible, even when it may initially be obscure to their target what exactly they are about. The experience of structural disadvantage, after all, brings with it epistemic resources that may not be available to more privileged individuals, and against this background it is important to listen carefully to the testimony that is expressed through reactive complaint, and to do our best to engage with it on its own terms. The default receptive stance, in other words, should be a willingness to enter into the kind of conversational exchange with the angry subject that is oriented toward acknowledgment and repair.

But there is a different if less common pathology in this general vicinity, which is to cede automatic authority to the members of disadvantaged communities whenever they deploy reactive resources to voice interpersonal complaints. Those of us who operate in a space of privilege should of course give vulnerable parties the benefit of the doubt when complaints are addressed to us and do our best to make sense of them as they are presented. But nobody is an unfailing advocate on their own behalf, and it is possible for any of us to fall short in the challenging task of locating the lines in our social relations that are not to be crossed. We encountered this already in discussing the politics of grievance, where angry complaints are pressed, often by individuals who have suffered real hardship and disadvantage, that simply do not make much sense at the end of the day. We can apply a principle of charity to these cases, trying to identify genuine injustices that might be the thing that the angry masses

are actually up in arms about. But as I noted earlier, there is also something patronizing about this response, which amounts to a refusal to take the complainants seriously as moral agents who are competent to address demands on their own behalf.

In other cases, the complaint that is pressed by a vulnerable person might be coherent and perhaps even have some initial plausibility, without standing up to sympathetic scrutiny when everything is taken into account. In part this is because moral reasoning—on a relational conception of it—is not just sensitive to the effects of potential actions on disadvantaged parties, but must also consider their effects on other parties, and arrive at a comparative assessment of the significance of the different individuals' objections to them. The Muslim students at Hamline University might sincerely have thought they were victims of Islamophobia when an instructor, Erika López Prater, shared a respectful image of the Prophet in an Art History class.[36] But it was clearly wrong for the college administration to defer unthinkingly to their point of view, without taking into consideration the conscientious efforts that Prater—herself somewhat vulnerable as an instructor on a contingent contract—had made to contextualize the image and to protect students who might take offense at it from exposure. What is called for, in cases of this kind, is a conversation that opens into the kind of delicate "co-deliberation" whereby the interests of different parties are sympathetically taken into account in a good faith effort to identify principles of conduct acceptable to all.[37] This is to my mind a generic way of characterizing the project of moral deliberation, and it faces many challenges in practice. The objections that vulnerable individuals have to prospective policies and principles need to be registered and understood and taken seriously, within this reasoning—but as important starting points for co-deliberation, rather than as trump cards that automatically bring moral reasoning to an end.

3. Social Power and Interpersonal Recognition.

The social frictions inherent in reactive blame impede normal interpersonal relations, coming between the subject and their target until the infractions that occasioned it are dealt with. The constructive response to this, I have suggested, is the kind of communicative exchange that is continuous with moral co-

deliberation, oriented toward understanding and—if necessary—acknowledgement and repair. But the same attitudes that potentially initiate a constructive process of this kind sometimes stand in the way of its being realized. This is a still different pathology of reactive anger, one that is interactive rather than exclusively on the side of either the subject or the target.

The specific phenomenon I have in mind here is that whereby angry protest is met with a response that is equally angry and unyielding. I suggested in the Chapter Two that there is something confrontational about the action tendencies characteristic of the reactive attitudes; they incline the subject to stand up to the target, protesting the way the subject has been treated by the target and insisting that the infraction be dealt with. But confrontations sometimes become entrenched, especially when the target of reactive blame gets defensive; under these circumstances, anger can beget anger in a ratchet that never progresses to the stage of co-deliberation or acknowledgment and repair. Instead, each side sinks deeper into their sense of grievance and complaint, making uncompromising demands of the other that only become more adamant when they are met with defiance. This is of course a potentially dangerous dynamic that can spiral completely out of control, and there is nothing valuable about it that I can discern.[38]

If a practice of accountability relations is to play a constructive role in the life of a moral community, then the propensity to reactive blame will need to be married to techniques that generally prevent this kind of defensive ratchet from getting started. People who operate within the morality system need to be conscious of the pathologies of reactive blame, including this interactive variant, and do what they can to block them. What is called for is vigilant deployment of our powers of managerial control over our attitudes, in the service of a specifically moral objective. As subjects of the reactive attitudes, we have obligations to ensure that the attitudinal power we have over others is not used to frivolous, malevolent, or merely narcissistic ends. As allies, we need to be mindful of the interests of those on whose behalf we address moral demands, and find ways of standing by them that honor their voice and their agency. And as targets of reactive blame, we have to acknowledge the entitlement of everyone to participate as equals in the system of accountability, and listen sympathetically to their complaints. To

respond to anger automatically with defensive counter-anger reflects an absurd presumption of infallibility and a refusal to accept the very possibility that criticism might be warranted.

Of course, if everyone were living up to their moral obligations then reactive blame would never be called for in the first place. It is inherently an instrument of non-ideal response, a way of dealing with individuals who fall short of what they owe to each other morally (or who at least appear to have done so). If you are interacting with people who have not only acted wrongfully, but who are also disinclined to respond constructively to blame, that will raise interesting questions about how best to manage your warranted reactions to their conduct. If the communicative expression of reactive blame would only provoke angry denial and defensive recrimination, there may be good strategic and prudential reasons for charting a different path through the situation. The refusal to engage constructively on the part of the target will be a further injustice, and the need to accommodate oneself to it an additional basis for resentment on the part of the victim; but that may still be the best way to respond. In other situations, especially ones that involve structural injustice and oppression, it may make sense to band together with other victims and allies to protest the situation with persistence and force. Anything short of that may fail to penetrate the defensive barriers that the perpetrators and beneficiaries of injustice have erected to acknowledgement and constructive engagement.[39] These political contexts are ones in which the power dimension of reactive blame is particularly significant: it can be a tool to be deployed by individuals whose social situation deprives them of access to other levers of influence.

The mobilization of reactive blame in political protest is a way of bringing social pressure to bear on those who are morally recalcitrant. It creates new reasons, grounded in the aversive quality of opprobrium and its forceful expression, for political actors who have proven themselves unresponsive to the moral considerations that tell against existing social arrangements. To exercise social power in this way to influence morally recalcitrant agents seems a defensible technique of non-ideal politics, a reasonable response to political actors who have not been willing to engage in a good-faith effort to understand and rectify the injustices brought about through their own behavior. But are exertions of the social power latent in reactive blame defensible outside of this special context, particularly within private

relations between wrongdoers and their victims that are paradigmatic for a relational conception of accountability?

I have suggested that reactive blame has a potentially constructive role to play within this interpersonal context, as part of a communicative process that is oriented toward repair. It goes together with an egalitarian conception of the moral community in which each is acknowledged to have the right to assert moral claims on their own behalf, and in which those assertions open into sincere communicative exchanges. An accountability practice that is structured in this way reflects the value attached to ongoing relationships that have been damaged through disregard of moral interests; it incorporates a mechanism that is appropriate to that ongoing value, one that serves a constructive role in a process of acknowledgment and renewed commitment. This mechanism, however, relies on the social power we have over each other in virtue of our aversion to the reactive attitudes of our fellows. By exerting this power, we give others reasons for action that they would not otherwise have. And the understandable concern is that these are reasons of the wrong kind to figure so centrally in a set of moral practices. We should want people to comply with the requirements that they owe to us out of a concern for our interests and claims, not because of their desire to avoid our anger and disdain.

A philosophical account of blame that seems vulnerable to this objection is Bernard Williams's influential "proleptic" interpretation.[40] According to this influential account, blame often incorporates a presupposition that is literally false. We treat people who may not have had reasons to care about the moral standards that they flout as if they were subject to such reasons when we apply the pressures of blame. This practice has the interesting feature, however, that it reliably makes true the false assumption that it begins from. Blame taps into a concern that the target has to be respected by people they respect, making clear to them that their immoral conduct will attract the subject's opprobrium. This process gives the target of blame reason to comply with moral standards that they didn't antecedently have, through deployment of the aversive social pressures I have been thematizing in this book. As Williams writes: "To blame someone in this way is, roughly, to tell him he had a reason to act otherwise, and in a direct sense this may not have been true. Yet in a way it has now become true, in virtue of his having a disposition to

do things that people he respects expect of him, and in virtue of the recognition, which it is hoped that the blame will bring to him, of what those people expect."[41]

There are a number of puzzling features of this account of proleptic blame that commentators on it have not fully come to terms with. For one thing, however the proleptic process is supposed to work, it cannot have the effect of making true the normative statement that was false of the target agent at the time when they acted wrongfully. It remains the case that the wrongdoer did not have an internal reason to comport themselves differently at the time of the action that now attracts the subject's blame. What happens, instead, is that exposure to blame gives rise to a new internal reason that wasn't previously in place, connected to the wrongdoer's concern to be respected by people they respect. Of course, if that concern is already determinately present in the wrongdoer's subjective motivational set prior to the episode of blame, then blame would function not to create a new internal reason for action, but merely to call the wrongdoer's attention to a reason that was there all along—like pointing out that the clear liquid in the glass someone is reaching for contains petrol rather than gin.[42] The proleptic story thus takes advantage of a theme that Williams himself emphasizes in his treatment of the topic, namely that there can be indeterminacy or vagueness in the question of what internal reasons a given agent has at a given time. Blame "presents a consideration that contributes to what it is talking about", and the way it does this is by making it determinately true, in a way it was not before, that there is (now) compelling internal reason for the target to do better.[43]

This new reason, as I noted already, is connected to the target agent's concern to be respected by, or "ethically well related to",[44] people whom they in turn hold in high regard. But there are two respects in which this seems to be a reason of the wrong kind. For one thing, it is unclear how it could be mobilized within the relational context that we have taken to be the primary setting for the operation of focused blame. In Williams's own example, the agent is one who, when told that he really ought to be nicer to his wife, replies: "I don't care. Don't you understand? I really do not care."[45] This callous cruelty is something that one might imagine his wife would be inclined to blame him for. But it is very hard to see how proleptic blame, understood in Williams's terms, could get a foothold here. The husband's cruel

comportment, and his apparent indifference to its effect on his wife, strongly suggest that he does not have even a latent tendency to respect her. So it is unclear how *her* deployment of blame might make it the case that he now has a reason to treat her better, one that is grounded in the previously indeterminate desire to be respected by people he respects. He doesn't respect his wife, so no amount of blame from her seems capable, on its own, of operating to generate a reason of this kind in the husband. The same point applies to Miranda Fricker's deployment of a similarly proleptic mechanism in the paradigm context of communicative blame.[46] The victim's blame of the wrongdoer is supposed to bring about alignment in "motivationally effective understanding" by appealing to the wrongdoer's general motive to be respected by the victim. But it is not clear how this is supposed to work, really: a wrongdoer who is willing to disregard the interests and claims of their victim is not likely to have a concern to be respected by them or to comply with their expectations.[47]

The context in which one would expect Williams's proleptic mechanism to work is one involving third-party blame. Maybe the cruel husband does not respect his wife sufficiently to care very much about whether she respects him. But he might well want to be ethically well related to the distinguished colleague who reproaches him in the Senior Common Room about his treatment of his spouse. This seems to me to be the natural interpersonal context in which Williams's proleptic form of blame might be effective. The concern on which proleptic blame operates is not supposed to be the mere desire to avoid hostility, but something more "ethically important", namely, the desire to stand in relations of respect with certain other individuals in the community to which the target of blame belongs.[48] Perhaps you don't care very much about your victim, but there are other people whose opinion potentially matters, and they can have an effect on your motivations and reasons by blaming you for your treatment of the victim.[49]

There are certainly important social situations that fit this general template, in which an agent who shows little concern for a victim might be susceptible to the influence of attitudinal pressures exerted by those they regard as their peers. It is often important for the peers in this situation to use their influence to induce the wrongdoer to do better, if they are able to; and this kind of process is also often at work in situations of effective political protest against systematic wrongdoing and injustice. But it is important to

be clear that the reasons mobilized in this situation are in a different way reasons of the wrong kind. Not only are they not reasons that can be deployed by the victim on their own behalf. Even in the peer context where they might be effective, they have the wrong content (as it were). The agent who does better in response to the reproach of their respected peers is not genuinely concerned for the interests of their victim, but for the adverse consequences of a failure to satisfy moral demands within the informal economy of esteem. The cruel husband might care about the disapproval of his colleague, and that could lead him to treat his wife better; but for all that he might still just not care about her.

Williams himself would not have been especially troubled by this conclusion, taking it to reflect a realistic assessment of the limited reach of moral reasons. Standards of interpersonal morality are simply not ones that everyone has reason to care about, given the vagaries of their subjective motivational sets. Creating internal reasons through the deployment of social power is perhaps a reasonable function for a system of accountability to fulfill under this assumption—it is better to give people bad reasons to do the right thing that to leave them without any reason at all for so acting. And Williams might have added that the proleptic processes that interest him operate through an interpersonal mechanism that is itself of ethical importance. Agents are responding not merely to the brute hostility of random individuals, but to the disesteem of peers whom they themselves hold in high regard, and in a way that is responsive to the value of reciprocity. There is a relational ideal at work in this proleptic process, albeit not one that extends to the relation between the agent and the individual whom they have wronged.

Leaving Williams's skepticism about objective moral reasons to the side, how do these concerns about the reasons mobilized through blame apply to the relational account of it? According to that account, the norms that define what we owe to each other as moral persons represent obligations that everyone has presumptively decisive reason to comply with. When we blame people for flouting these requirements, we are therefore not presupposing falsely that they had a reason to comply that did not in fact obtain at the time of the wrongful action. Rather, we are making interpersonally salient the fact that the target flouted an obligation that genuinely obtained, indeed one that was owed specifically to us if we were the individual who was wronged by the agent's immoral conduct. At the same time, we are doing

this in a way that generates attitudinal pressures that are, as I have been saying, sources of social influence in their own right. Reactive blame in this way creates a second layer of reasons for the agent at whom it is targeted, and the question remains whether they are reasons of the wrong kind, and whether our reliance on them in this context can be reconciled with our respect for the moral agency of those at whom they are targeted. Is there something essentially manipulative about the exercise of social power through reactive blame and its expression, given that it operates in this way?[50]

Within the context of the relationship between the agent and the party they have wronged, blame does not speak to Williams's high-minded desire to be respected by people one respects, for reasons I have been at pains to emphasize. The agent has already shown, through their willful disregard for the interests of their victim, that they do not really respect them or hold them in high esteem. There is no operative concern in the agent's psyche—either choate or inchoate—to stand in relations of reciprocity with the victim, so that is not the channel through with social leverage might be exerted. Within this important context, the mechanism of influence must be somewhat more primitive, though perhaps not so primitive as the mere desire to avoid hostility that Williams invokes in this connection. Mere hostility could be experienced as a force of nature that one simply wishes to get out of the way of, perhaps akin to the brute antipathy that is part of the politics of resentment discussed earlier in this chapter. Resentment, by contrast, is ostensibly *about* something that was done by the individual who is its target, which gives it a different and more focused character. Still, it achieves its characteristic functions within the relational context in virtue of its oppositional aspect as a source of friction that impedes ongoing interactions between the parties to it. It is a pain to be the target of reactions like this, which come between the parties in a particular way, focusing their attention on the infraction that the agent committed, and coding it as something that needs to be dealt with before normal relations can resume. This is a syndrome of reactions that the wrongdoer might be responsive to, even if they have no particular desire to be respected by the individual who is resentful on account of what they have done.

To be sure, the reasons mobilized through reactive blame are themselves normative considerations. Even if resentment and its expression succeed in generating these reasons, there is no

guarantee that the agent at whom they are targeted will be moved by them. A sufficiently callous and alienated wrongdoer might be untroubled by or indifferent to the attitudinal pressures involved in reactive blame, even if they contribute to making their own life go worse. Still, the natural assumption is that an agent who was not responsive to primary moral considerations might still be responsive to these secondary reasons, even when the person subject to blame is not someone they are antecedently inclined to respect. The sand that gets thrown into the gears by reactive blame might move such a person to register the protest that is thereby lodged and begin to respond to the challenge interpersonally. No doubt this is more likely to happen if the wrongdoer is a basically conscientious person who just messed up on this occasion, as we are all wont to do from time to time. But even Williams's cruel husband could conceivably be moved by the wife's expression of resentment to consider the urgent questions she is putting to him about his treatment of her and to begin the process of acknowledgment and repair. The potential responsiveness of agents to reactive blame—even agents such as this one—is a reflection of their residual human sociability, their susceptibility to the focused attitudes of others even outside contexts of antecedent reciprocal respect.

A further important point about these secondary reasons of blame is that they are parasitic on primary moral reasons, in at least two senses. First, within the relational context we have been discussing angry disapprobation is a reaction to the violation of a prior requirement that the wrongdoer owed to their victim. It is because the subject was wronged by the target that the victim now has reason to resent them. Second, in the more constructive forms of it that I have highlighted, reactive blame is oriented toward the goal of bringing the target to re-engage with the relational norms whose violation provided warrant for resentment in the first place. The subject is disposed to stand up to the target agent in protest, initiating an interpersonal process whose continuation is understood to involve remorse, apology, and repair on the part of the wrongdoer. We might say that reactive blame is proleptic under these conditions in the boring sense that it anticipates a possible future narrative in which the wrongdoer acknowledges the primary moral reasons at issue and renews their commitment to them.[51] It also reflects the implicit hope that its target is minimally responsive to the attitudes of others, so that the reasons created through reactive blame

might move them to initiate the process of re-engaging with the primary reasons that their wrongful conduct disregarded.[52] In virtue of these features of it, reactive blame—unlike the anger of the choleric boss discussed in section 1—does not seem merely manipulative. It is a response to a genuine moral infraction, and its larger function, in the paradigm cases we have been discussing, is to incentivize the target to recognize the infraction and to honor the very values that were flouted.

The wrongdoer in this situation might object to being subject to the incentives latent in blame, insofar as they involve aversive pressures that constitutively make the agent's life go worse. But these effects are foreseeable byproducts of an attitude that is warranted by the wrongdoer's own behavior, and it was open to them to avoid the unwanted pressures by conducting themselves more conscientiously in the first place. It is they who have impaired their relations to the victim, and it is therefore legitimate for the victim to stand up for themselves in this way and insist that the impairment be dealt with before things can move forward.[53] Social power, mobilized to this effect, presupposes rather than supplants the relational considerations that give agents their primary reasons for staying on the right side of the moral lines, and it is consistent with requirements of respectful interaction under conditions in which those lines have already been crossed.

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[1] This is roughly the context of "communicative blame" that Miranda Fricker takes to be paradigmatic in her analysis of the phenomenon; see her "What's the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation", *Noûs* 50 (2016), pp. 165-83." I offer some comments in section three of this chapter about the "proleptic" mechanisms that Fricker takes to be operative within this communicative context.

[2] On the general topic of moral repair, see Linda Radzik, *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law, and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), and Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[3] The theme of power as capacity for domination is influentially discussed in Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, Second Edition (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[4] It is worth noting that there can be cases in which we cultivate our anger, and deploy it strategically, that are not subject to the same objections. If there is a genuine grievance, for instance, it might make good sense, and also be morally defensible, to manage one's anger in the direction of intensification. This is sometimes a legitimate technique of political resistance to injustice (a theme I return to below).

[5] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, trans., Walter Kaufmannn, ed. (New York: Vintage, 1989). Parenthetical references in the following will be to sections and pages in this volume.

[6] Mark Danner, "The Con He Rode in on", *New York Review of Books* (November 19, 2020 issue).

[7] On the relation between resentment and ressentiment, see H. A. Rushdy, *After Injury: A Historical Anatomy of Forgiveness, Resentment, and Injury* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), Chap. 4. Rushdy suggests that these two terms may overlap in their connotations more than some philosophers have tended to allow, which may be true. But he himself notes that these connotations cluster around distinct notions of umbrage and envy. He goes on to observe that the notion of umbrage is prominent in the British tradition of reflection on resentment (Chap. 5), while envy is more prominent in the Continental tradition that thematizes *ressentiment* (Chap. 6). Cf. pp. 148-9, on the contrast between these traditions: "With Kierkegaard, we start to witness the shift in meaning from resentment at being injured to resentment at others' success, from umbrage to envy."

[8] Alternative interpretations are proposed e.g. in Rüdiger Bittner, "*Ressentiment*", in Richard Schacht, ed., *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality. Essays on Nietzsche's "Genealogy of Morals"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 127-38; Mark Migotti, "Slave Morality, Socrates, and the Bushmen: A Reading of the First Essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58 (1998), pp. 745-79; and Bernard Reginster, *The Will to Nothingness: An Essay on Nietzsche's "On the Genealogy of Morality"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

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[9] I draw on the general interpretation developed in my paper "*Ressentiment*, Value, and Self-Vindication: Making Sense of Nietzsche's Slave Revolt", in Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu, eds., *Nietzsche and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 110-137.

[10] The acceptance of an interpretation that makes sense of one's situation might be understood as a primitive manifestation of Nietzsche's will to power; cf. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, sec. III.28.

[11] See Anne Case and Angus Deacon, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), and Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: The New Press, 2016).

[12] On the connection of affective polarization with social identity in contemporary US politics, see Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

[13] For this suggestion, see Frans de Waal, *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*, Stephen Macedo and Josiah Ober, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 52-8.

[14] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, Expanded Edition, George Schwab, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[15] See, for examples, Heather Knight, "Very 'Mean Girls': S. F. Democrats Reject New Democratic Club for Not Being Democratic Enough", *San Francisco Chronicle* (May 6, 2023): https://www.sfchronicle.com/sf/bayarea/heatherknight/article/city-politics-democrat-18073621.php

[16] Connected to this are the endless moral panics we get about the nefarious schemes of democratic politicians, who allegedly want to cancel Dr. Seuss and take away peoples' gas stoves and generally impose their malign woke values on them.

[17] Compare his discussion of asceticism in Essay Three of *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

[18] See, for example, Katherine J. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness and the Rise of Scott Walker* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

[19] I believe that there can be such a thing as pure enmity, which is not understood to be about anything, precisely insofar as it is bound up with processes of identity formation. Some of the harmless antagonisms

that accrete around regional loyalties and attachments to sports teams might be an example—the hatred of the Red Sox fan for the Yankees is robust, *because* it is prior to any specific grievance that might be cited to justify it. Having said that, in more serious cases there might be some tendency to experience hatred and antagonism in terms of vague imagined grievances even at the ground level. That there is this tendency is in fact a prediction of my account, insofar as the intelligibility deficit latent in pure enmity is experienced as a psychic need. Narratives of grievance would still have work to do in this context, replacing a vague and inchoate sense of wrong with more specific stories that give one reason for the antagonism one isn't prepared to let go of.

[20] There are also, of course, secondary cognitive processes that operate to reinforce the primary processes I have tried to outline, such as tendencies to motivated reasoning; see, for instance, Thomas B. Edsal, "The Real Trump Mystery", *The New York Times* (September 25, 2024): https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/25/opinion/trump-maga-sources-support.html. If my hypothesis is on the right lines, one of the main motivations to resist evidence and information that might disrupt the narratives of grievance to which people cling is the psychic satisfaction that those narratives afford, insofar as they make sense of the subject's affective orientation within the social world.

[21] It is noteworthy to me that we are apt to be at least somewhat unnerved by the reactive anger that is directed toward us in cases such as this, even when it is clearly unhinged. We don't simply dismiss it out of hand, but look for some way to respond or to set the record straight—an attitude behind the search for legitimate but unspoken grievances that I go on to discuss in the text. I think this is a reflection of the fact that the power dimension remains in place even in cases of ungrounded resentment such as these.

[22] A less reductive interpretation of the object of rural resentment is proposed by Hochschild in *Strangers in Their Own Land*; see also Robert Wuthnow, *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Small-Town America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018). The narratives that Hochschild and Wuthnow distill from their empathic conversations with people living in red America emphasize the sense that formerly marginalized individuals have been cutting in line ahead of them to access the American dream, and that government exerts a malign influence on the social fabric of their rural communities. These are

less crazy ways of understanding the social world than some of the more popular current conspiracy theories; but they still represent narratives of grievance that are difficult to engage with, because they are abstract and somewhat detached from specific incidents. Cf. Wuthnow, *The Left Behind*, p. 113: "If [rural outrage] were strictly about economic issues, it would respond to policy proposals about bringing jobs and raising wages. But it is more about a perceived cultural threat that is often ill-defined even though it runs deep."

[23] A recent book that avoids this danger is Tom Schaller and Paul Waldman, *White Rural Range: The Threat to American Democracy* (New York: Random House, 2024), which expresses some exasperation at the ready willingness of white rural populations in the contemporary US to accept bad faith narratives of cultural grievance that distract from rather than address their very real social and economic challenges.

[24] Cf. Danner, "The Con He Rode in on", whose subtitle paraphrases a theme in the Trump rally he is reporting on: "Why do people hardly even talk about all the car plants Donald Trump has brought to Michigan?" The remarkable point is that the audience at a Trump rally *in Michigan* was happy to indulge Trump's delusional fantasy that he was responsible for a surge in car manufacturing in their state. Even when it came to their legitimate economic hardships, in other words, these people apparently preferred the imaginary efforts of their political hero to actual policies that might bring back manufacturing jobs. It is very hard to know how one is supposed to engage with an outlook like that. (Note the characteristic rhetorical twist through which the imaginary accomplishment is itself expressed in the vocabulary of grievance: the MSM is refusing to talk about all those car plants Donald Trump is responsible for!)

[25] I wish I had some novel solutions to propose. It would help if we could reduce some of the barriers—of geography, educational attainment, and media environment—that encourage people to sort themselves into mutually antagonistic tribal groups. It would also be nice if we could cultivate a greater level of skepticism in people about social narratives that provide cheap emotional satisfactions. For discussion of the challenges in this area, see Thomas B. Edsal, "The Resentment Fueling the Republican Party is Not Coming from the Suburbs", *The New York Times* (January 25, 2023): https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/25/opinion/rural-voters-republican-realignment.html.

[26] See, for instance, Stephen Darwall, "Bipolar Obligation", as reprinted in his *Morality, Authority, and Law: Essays in Second-Personal Ethics I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 20-39. For discussion, see my *The Moral Nexus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), sec. 3.4.

[27] See my *The Moral Nexus*, sec. 3.3.

[28] Similar points are made, e.g., by Christine M. Korsgaard in her "Creating the Kingdom of Ends: Reciprocity and Responsibility in Personal Relations", as reprinted in her *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 188-222, and T. M. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), Chap. 4. However, neither Korsgaard nor Scanlon trace these phenomena to the relational content of the moral norms that that we are addressing through reactive blame.

[29] For an illuminating discussion of some cases that exhibit these problems, see Myisha Cherry, *The Case for Rage: Why Anger is Essential to Anti-racist Struggle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), chap. 5. See also Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism", as reprinted in her *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), pp. 124-33.

[30] It is of course true that we all have a stake in living in a society that is free from egregious structural injustice, even if we are not the primary victims of the unjust structures. (Cf. Lorde, "The Uses of Anger", pp. 132-3: "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own. And I am not free as long as one person of Color remains chained.") It follows that we all have good reason to combat injustice in our communities in whatever ways we can. The question is only about the role that should be played by vicarious anger in these processes. It sometimes has an important role to play, but everything depends on the relationship between the subject of indignation and the injured party on whose behalf they are indignant.

[31] For a limited defense of vicarious advocacy that is sensitive to these special responsibilities, see Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others", *Cultural Critique* 20 (1991-92), pp. 5-32.

[32] This does not mean that total deference to the position of the injured party is always called for. Loyalty to a friend who has been egregiously wronged might lead you to continue to be angry with the perpetrator

on the friend's behalf, even after they have offered forgiveness, if (for instance) you think the perpetrator was not sufficiently contrite and your friend was somewhat naïve. In this situation, it might continue to make sense for you to stand up for your friend's interests (though of course you should be delicate about how you do that). Interestingly, it is harder to imagine cases in which loyalty might make it reasonable to offer forgiveness on your friend's behalf even when they are not yet prepared to do that themselves. Even if you think it is time for the friend to move on from their anger, they have an autonomy interest in deciding for themselves when to exercise their discretion to forgive, and it is not for you to second-guess their decision. (Thanks to Johann Frick for discussion of cases of this kind.)

[33] On the other hand, the example of Elon Musk and his apparently very thin skin suggests that this might not be so easy to pull off.

[34] This is a theme, for instance, in Owen Flanagan, *How to Do Things with Emotions: The Morality of Anger and Shame across Cultures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021). A different vocabulary for understanding the social construction of emotion is that of a paradigm scenario that helps us to organize our emotional experiences; see Ronald de Souse, *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987).

[35] Cf. Lorde, "The Uses of Anger".

[36] See Vimal Patel, "A Lecturer Showed a Painting of the Prophet Mohamad. She Lost Her Job", *The New York Times* (January 8, 2023): https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/08/us/hamline-university-islam-prophet-muhammad.html

[37] The idea that morality is a system of co-deliberation is part of the contractualist account that T. M. Scanlon develops in *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[38] For a comical example, see the recent Netflix series *Beef*.

[39] See Cherry, *The Case for Rage*, and Amia Srinavasan, "The Aptness of Anger", *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 26 (2018), pp. 123-44.

[40] Bernard Williams, “Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame”, as reprinted in his *Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Papers 1982-1993* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 35-45.

[41] Williams, “Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame”, pp. 41-2.

[42] This is of course a central example in Williams’s original statement of his internal reasons view, ”Internal and External Reasons”, as reprinted in his *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 101-13.

[43] Williams, “Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame”, p. 42. See p. 39 of this article for the idea that it is often vague or indeterminate what an agent has reason to do, on the internalist view; and p. 43, which connects this point to the inherent “obscurity” of blame. I am indebted here to discussions with Jorah Dannenberg, which helped me to see the importance of this strand in Williams’s discussion to his proleptic account of the operations of blame. On the general theme that there is indeterminacy in practical reasoning and other processes for engaging someone’s will, see Dannenberg’s “An Indeterminate Conception of Practical Reasoning”, *European Journal of Philosophy* (2024), pp. 1-15: https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12992

[44] Williams, “Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame”, p. 41.

[45] Williams, “Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame”, p. 39.

[46] Fricker, “What’s the Point of Blame?”; the appeal to a proleptic mechanism within the paradigm context is in sec. 3, and the specific appeal to the wrongdoer’s desire to be respected or esteemed by the blamer appears on p. 176 of this section.

[47] A further potential problem with Fricker’s proleptic mechanism is this: it is supposed to bring about alignment in moral reasons by exploiting a false assumption, insofar as the target agent is treated “*as if* they recognized the motivating reason when in fact they didn’t” (“What’s the Point of Blame?”, p. 176). But in blaming someone, one precisely assumes that they were not in fact moved by moral reasons, either at the time of the wrongful action or at the time when blame is applied. An intervention that does carry this false presupposition about the target, at least at the time of the intervention, might be, “I accept your

apology" (said of someone who has not yet apologized or shown any remorse). But I take it we wouldn't really recognize this as blame—and it would operate via a process of presupposition accommodation that, in this context, would strike us as somewhat manipulative.

[48] Williams, "Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame", p. 41. The desire to be respected by people one respects also makes a significant appearance in Williams' *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), chap. 4.

[49] Williams seems to assume here that the peer's blame would amount to an attitude of disrespect, which is a little puzzling. A willingness to blame the target might be thought precisely to be a way of respecting them as a moral agent, someone with the capacity to comply with interpersonal moral expectations and demands. Presumably, if there is disrespect latent in peer blame, it is not a lack of recognition as a moral person, but a lack of esteem. Compare the distinction between recognition and appraisal respect in Stephen L. Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect", *Ethics* 88 (1977), pp. 36-49.

[50] For an illuminating discussion of this challenge that I am in broad agreement with, see Victoria McGeer, "Civilizing Blame", in D. Justin Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini, eds. *Blame: Its Nature and Norms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 162-88. McGeer emphasizes in particular that reactive blame can open into a dialogical exchange, which is a form of influence that is non-manipulative, insofar as it operates through rather than bypasses the target's capacities for reasoning. I agree with her that this is an important feature of non-pathological forms of reactive blame. But there is still a residual question about whether it is ethically problematic to initiate a dialogical exchange through an attitude that is an original source of aversive social pressures. That is the question I am trying to grapple with in the text.

[51] Cf. Oded Na'aman, "The Fitting Resolution of Anger", *Philosophical Studies* 177 (2020), pp. 2417-30, sec. 3.

[52] We might say, with Williams, that this kind of blame "presents a consideration that contributes to what it is talking about", but only in the way an invitation (say) contributes to the party that it references. There

will be no party without the invitation; but the issuing of the invitation does not alone make it the case that the party takes place—it still needs to be taken up in the right way by the recipient.

[53] A system of accountability pressures might also have a forward-looking role to play in a moral community, providing secondary reasons for complying with moral demands that align with and support our primary reasons for doing so. In this guise, the system of informal accountability would function in a way that parallels the role of legal sanctions in reinforcing independent moral prohibitions on murder, assault, fraud, reckless endangerment, and so on.