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Valuing Blame

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1. Introduction

Blame is a puzzling phenomenon. Given the atrocities and crimes we daily witness, it seems like a mistake to wholly forswear blame, yet it often remains obscure why this is: What, if anything, is good or valuable about our blaming practices? Why wouldn't it be better to wholly reject the punitive practices of blame, especially in light of their often corrosive and divisive effects, and instead embrace an ethic of unrelenting forgiveness and mercy?[1] Aren't sadness and disappointment more enlightened responses to blameworthiness than resentment and indignation? The senses of goodness and rightness at stake are all things considered good and right rather than just good or right in this or that respect. Moreover, the question is not metaphysical but moral. The skepticism stems not from doubts about our status as free and morally responsible agents but from doubts about the value of these practices.[2] The "blame curmudgeons," as I will call them, reject blame, arguing that there is nothing good or right about blaming, or that whatever aspects of blame that are good and right are insufficient to justify the practice in light of both its harmful effects and our possessing myriad alternative, more enlightened responses to blameworthiness.[3] It is to this objection to blame that I aim to

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[1] Watson (1987b) raises this important question and offers Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi as examples of persons who forswore blame.

[2] Smart (1961, pp. 305–6) betrays an ambiguity on this point. It is unclear if his objection to the kind of blame that is "bound up" with metaphysical freedom is that we are not free and thus this kind of blame is unfair or inappropriate, or rather that this kind of blame is inherently morally problematic. Then again, perhaps he has both objections in mind. For metaphysically based objections to blame see Double (1991), Pereboom (2001), Smilansky (2000), Strawson (1986).

[3] See Seneca (1995).

respond. I will therefore assume that agents are sometimes blameworthy.[4] The challenge is to show that and explain why it is ever, all things considered, good or right to blame blameworthy agents.[5]

So is blame ever required? Consider the following case reported by Dostoevsky's character Ivan Karamazov:[6]

> There was a general at the beginning of the century . . . who [felt] all but certain that his service [had] earned him the power of life and death over his subjects. And so one day a house-serf, a little boy, only eight years old, threw a stone while he was playing and hurt the paw of the general's favorite hound. . . . It was reported to [the general] that this boy had thrown a stone at her and hurt her paw. "So it was you," the general looked the boy up and down. "Take him!" . . . The general orders [the serfs] to undress the boy; the child is stripped naked, he shivers, he's crazy with fear, he doesn't dare make a peep. . . . "Drive him!" the general commands. The huntsmen shout, "Run, run!" The boy runs. . . . "Sic him!" screams the general and looses the whole pack of wolfhounds on him. He hunted him down before the mother's eyes, and the dogs tore the child to pieces . . .! I believe the general was later declared incompetent to administer his estates. ([1880] 1990, pp. 242–43)

What is your reaction to this story? Mine is a sense of outrage, not just at the cruel murder but also at the failure to treat this crime seriously. Now admittedly further details of this case must be made explicit. Perhaps there were extenuating circumstances that mitigated the general's responsibility. (Perhaps he was insane.) But for the sake of argument, suppose that there were no such considerations. I find myself no less outraged at the general's cruelty than at the legal system's failure to take seriously the child's life and to demonstrate the people's commitment to him as a person of worth.

Now my topic in this paper is blame, not punishment, and its proper setting is morality, not the law. Nevertheless this case suggests some important facts that we must come to terms with when seeking to understand blame. First, not only is it fair sometimes to blame; sometimes it is also good. This needs explaining. What is it about blame, something that seems so unpleasant and potentially divisive, that can render it such a valuable part of our moral practices? Second, and this is a corollary of the first point, it would be wrong to

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[4] I take 'worthiness' in 'blameworthiness' merely to indicate that blame is permissible rather than required.

[5] From hereon I will leave the qualifier 'all things considered' implicit.

[6] Apparently this story appeared in the *Russian Herald*, no. 9 (1877) and was entitled "Memoirs of a Serf." See Dostoevsky ([1880] 1990, p. 785).

wholly forswear blame, as the above case of homicide illustrates.[7] What explains this?

The seeds of an answer are scattered throughout the philosophical landscape: namely that blame is connected to value.[8] Yet while many have suggested that blame is connected to value, few have either elucidated or defended this claim. Two important exceptions, however, are George Sher (2006) and R. Jay Wallace (2011), both of whom offer detailed accounts of the connection between blame and value. But while these accounts move us forward in understanding the value of blame, I argue in section 2 that both are problematic. Sher's account justifies only a very weak form of blame, failing to address the value of more severe blaming responses, such as resentment and indignation. Wallace's account fails to show that blaming is *essential* to valuing what we ought to value, leaving it unclear why we should not substitute sadness and disappointment for resentment and indignation. In order to substantiate the value of blame, in sections 3–5 I will provide a defense of the connection between value and blame that shows that blame is an essential way of valuing objects we ought to value. The connection holds, I argue, in virtue of the significance of free action and the standards governing how we ought to value objects of moral value, among which are the requirements that we defend and protect these objects. Sadness is not an apt substitute for blame because sadness cannot defend and protect these objects; only blame can play this role. Let us refer to this account of the relation between value and blame as the "value account of blame." On the basis of this account of the nature of blame we will be able to explain why we should not wholly forswear blame: if I fail to be outraged or censure the perpetrators of some crime, I fail to properly value its victims. Blaming, given the existence of blameworthy agents, is a mode of valuation required by the standards of value, and thus to forswear blame is to fail to value what we ought to value.

2. Blaming and Caring about Morality

In his recent book Sher (2006) offers an extensive treatment of blame. Two of his main contributions on this topic are his defense of a unique account of blame and his providing an ingenious argument that a commitment to blame and morality stand and fall together. According to Sher, "To blame someone . . . is to have certain affective and behavioral dispositions, each of which can be

[7] I will consider these points and questions, as much as possible, from a theory-neutral perspective. Thus I do not assume a Kantian, consequentialist, virtue ethical, or other theory. Because of this I allow for the possibility that the good and the right can come apart in both directions: what is best may not be right, and what is right may not be best. The account of blame I offer will allow us to link the evaluative with the deontic as I will attempt to ground the rightness of blame in its goodness.

[8] Duff (1986, p. 55); Feinberg (1970, p. 103); Hampton (1988b, p. 125); Murphy (1988, p. 18); Scanlon (2008, pp. 130, 144); Sher (2006, pp. 128–29); Walker (2006, p. 26); Wallace (1994, p. 69; 2011, p. 367).

traced to the combination of a belief that the person has acted badly . . . and a desire that this not be the case" (p. 115).[9] The affective and behavioral dispositions that the desire-belief pair gives rise to include anger, resentment, censure, and rebuke. Crucially it is only a contingent fact that the desire-belief pair gives rise to these dispositions (p. 137). So according to Sher, to blame Jones for failing to keep his promise is to believe that in so doing Jones has acted badly and to desire that Jones not have so acted and to be contingently disposed to affective and behavioral dispositions toward Jones, such as anger, indignation, and censure.

On the basis of this account of blame, Sher constructs a fascinating argument to show that caring about morality requires a commitment to blame.[10] Given the existence of many differing conceptions of morality, Sher constructs his argument solely on the basis of the formal features of morality—namely its being practical, universal, omnitemporal, overriding, and inescapable. His argument runs, roughly, as follows: a person who is committed to morality must desire not to violate its principles (given that morality is practical), desire that others not violate these principles (given that morality is universal), desire that no one in the past has violated these principles (given that morality is omnitemporal), and be disposed to certain affective and behavioral dispositions (given that morality is overriding and inescapable). The 'must' here is not psychological, but conceptual (Sher 2006, p. 124). Part of *what it is* to be committed to morality is to possess this universally and omnitemporally directed desire—namely the desire that for any bad action, the agent not have performed that action. But this just is the desire component of blame. Therefore, to give up blame would be to give up our commitment to morality: "[T]he cases for living as morality requires and for blaming those who do not must stand or fall together" (p. 135). We now have a potential answer to the question of whether blame is good or right: insofar as a commitment to morality is good and right, and surely it is both, then blame is also good and right.

What Sher's argument does not establish is striking: the argument does not establish that the affective and behavioral dispositions, such as dispositions to resentment and rebuke, are conceptually tied to a commitment to morality. Rather, the argument, at best, establishes that the desire that someone not have acted badly is conceptually tied to a commitment to morality. Recall that the desire that someone have not acted badly only *contingently* gives rise to these dispositions. There is no conceptual tie between blaming dispositions and a

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[9] I omit Sher's claims about blame for character traits here and throughout, as my focus will be limited to blame for actions and omissions. 'To act badly' is a technical phrase for Sher, meaning a morally defective act that renders the agent blameworthy (2006, p. 9). Hence if an agent's action ϕ is bad, then the agent is blameworthy for ϕ.

[10] The sense of commitment that Sher has in mind is, or at least includes, valuing: to be committed to morality is to value morality (cf. Sher 2006, pp. 128–29).

commitment to morality, and in this way Sher has left these dispositions undefended.[11] This is not an oversight on Sher's part. He is skeptical that these affective and behavioral dispositions are good or right, and he concludes his book by way of raising doubts about whether we should retain these practices (2006, p. 138).

Sher's defense of blame boils down to a defense of the desire that people not violate morality. But this, I submit, leaves our original questions about blame unanswered. Part of what is driving our present inquiry is the negative and harsh side of blame, which includes attitudes such as resentment and indignation and overt responses such as rebuke and censure. This observation naturally leads one to wonder whether Sher's account of blame accurately captures the phenomenon. Doesn't it make perfect sense to say, "I believe you acted badly and wish you hadn't, but I don't blame you for it"? To borrow a phrase from Wallace, albeit in a different context, Sher's account seems to "[leave] the blame out of blame."[12] But we need not settle this dispute here. Perhaps there are different species of blame, and perhaps Sher accurately captures one such species. However, there is a different species of blame, blame in the "reactive attitude sense,"[13] according to which, to blame someone is to experience resentment, indignation, or guilt because one perceives or judges that someone (including oneself) has violated a standard of conduct that one accepts, and these attitudes, in turn, essentially give rise to behavioral dispositions such as rebuke and censure. It is blame in the reactive attitude sense that fuels our present inquiry. And Sher's account offers no reason to believe that blame, in *this* sense, is ever good or right; indeed, he calls such claims into question.[14]

Sher's failure is instructive: his account failed because he defended only a contingent connection between a commitment to morality and the reactive attitudes. If we can show that blame (in the reactive attitude sense)[15] is *conceptually* tied to a commitment to morality, just like the species of blame that Sher identified, then we will have shown that blame should not always be forsworn. Moreover, considering Sher's account helpfully focuses our attention on the sense of blame that is at stake for us, directing us toward the reactive attitude

[11] Consider: "Because the relation between the desire-belief pairs and the dispositions is merely contingent, it would not be inconsistent for someone to acknowledge both the moral importance and the unavoidability of the desire-belief pairs but to deny either the moral importance or the avoidability of the dispositions to which they standardly give rise" (Sher 2006, p. 137).

[12] Wallace (2011, p. 349) levels this charge against Scanlon's (2008) recent account of blame.

[13] This conception of blame is derived from Strawson (1962). Proponents of this account of blame include Fischer and Ravizza (1998) and Wallace (1994).

[14] Hampton (1988a) also falls prey to this worry. Although her topic is punishment, not blame per se, she is seeking to offer a defense of retributive responses to wrongdoing. She argues that punishment is essentially "the experience of defeat at the hands of the victim (either directly or indirectly through a legal authority)" (p. 126). However, she believes it is possible to "punish" someone in this sense without causing him any pain (p. 126). Thus her defense, like Sher's, fails to show that it is ever good or right to engage in the harsher side of blame or punishment.

[15] From here on let 'blame' be understood to mean 'blame in the reactive attitude sense.'

sense of blame. Before developing an account of blame that builds on these insights, I will consider Wallace's recent defense of blame, which improves on Sher's account but, as we will see, fails for similar reasons.

Wallace (2011) offers a sustained critique of Scanlon's (2008) recent account of blame, a central objection being that Scanlon fails to make the reactive attitudes essential to blame. In the final section of his paper Wallace turns to the question "Why does it matter that we have [the reactive attitudes as a] distinctive response to immorality in our repertoire?" (2011, p. 366). He argues that "the disposition to blame is a way of taking to heart the values at the basis of morality that is peculiarly appropriate to the relational character of those values" (p. 368). For Wallace, like Sher, there is an intimate connection between morality and blame, but unlike Sher, this claim has relevance for us, since blame here is blame in the reactive attitude sense. Morality is based on, or reflects, a range of values, salient among which is the value of a distinctive kind of interpersonal relationship: namely the relationship of mutual recognition and regard.[16] Wallace rightly points out that caring or valuing involves a level of emotional engagement and vulnerability. If I care about my wife, then I will be disposed to rejoice in her successes and be sad at her failures. To be disposed to blame, also a kind of emotional response, is a way of valuing the values at the heart of morality. Wallace concedes (mistakenly, I believe), that it is "possible for someone to care about mutual recognition and regard without the tendency to feel resentment when they have been wronged by actions that flout the norms that constitute such relationships" (p. 369). He contends that valuing X does not require that we be disposed to blame the person who disvalues X; rather valuing requires only that we have some emotional attachment to X, such as sadness when X is harmed. But this concession seems to play directly into the blame curmudgeons' hands. If blame is simply one emotional response constitutive of valuing out of many, then should we not jettison blame in favor of more enlightened responses? To restate the worry: on Wallace's account, blame is not a *required* way of valuing what we ought to value but simply one way of valuing out of many. And so, one might argue, there is no reason that we must or should continue to engage in our blaming practices.

Wallace is aware of this objection and responds by arguing that blame is a "peculiarly appropriate" way of taking to heart the values at the center of morality. It is for this reason that it is important to have blame in our repertoire of responses to blameworthiness. The burden of this reply is on Wallace's claim of unique appropriateness: What is it, and is it important enough to silence our worries about blame? Wallace's claim of unique appropriateness is based on two further claims. First, resentment, indignation, and guilt are all relational in

[16] This relationship serves as the basis for the conception of morality offered in Scanlon (1998).

a way that sadness is not. To resent someone is to feel that she has wronged *you*; for you to feel guilt is for you to feel that you wronged someone else; and for you to feel indignation is for you "to be exercised on behalf of another person" (2011, p. 369). Second, resentment, unlike sadness, is available only as a form of response to the person wronged and thus highlights the relational character of the values at the heart of morality. It is in these two ways that blame is peculiarly appropriate to the relational character of the values at the heart of morality.

But this defense of blame falls short of showing that it is ever good or right to blame. The main source of difficulty for Wallace is that it is unclear why blame's supposed unique appropriateness renders blame something worth engaging in. Why does unique appropriateness matter? And if it does matter, is its value great enough to outweigh the undesirable effects of blame? Wallace is silent on these issues; he gives us no reason to think that unique appropriateness is important enough to silence our worries about blame's unpleasant and corrosive effects. Since we can value the values at the heart of morality by being disposed to feel sadness when others flout these values, and since it is unclear that there is anything of importance in the nature of blame's being a uniquely appropriate response, Wallace's account fails to respond to the blame curmudgeons.

Wallace's defense of blame fails, but, like Sher, offers us important insights. First, he rightly claims that blaming is a way of valuing objects of moral value, and this suggestion will play a central role in my own account of blame. Wallace's mistakes are also instructive. His defense of blame fails for the same reason that Sher's did: he failed to show that blame is essential to an activity that is good or right. Although blame is a way of valuing the values at the heart of morality, Wallace does not show that it is essential to valuing these values, but only that it is one way among others, and thus his defense leaves the blame curmudgeons' argument untouched. We can shore up the problems that ensued from this concession by showing that blame is essential to valuing what we ought to value.

3. Valuing and Morality

To understand why sadness is not an apt substitute for blame we must first understand more generally the nature of valuing and the standards that govern how we ought to value. Importantly, we will see that we *must* value certain objects, and that part of what it is to value them is to defend and protect them. In sections 4 and 5 I will argue that blame is essential to defending and protecting the objects that give rise to moral values, and thus blame is essential to *valuing* them. Blame turns out to be good and right because it is essential to valuing objects of moral value.

Let us begin with some familiar territory. We need first to distinguish valuing something from judging it to be valuable. To value something is to have a

complex set of attitudes and dispositions toward it, governed by a distinct set of norms—norms that indicate the proper way to think, feel, and act in light of the value (Anderson 1993, p. 2). In addition to the existence of a plurality of valuable objects, there is also a plurality of proper ways to care about objects of value: the proper way to care about persons differs from the proper way to care about music (pp. 4–5). Each distinct object of value will, in virtue of its nature, give rise to a distinct set of norms concerning how we ought to value it: how we ought to think, feel, and act in light of it (cf. pp. 10–11; Dillon 1992, p. 110). But this plurality notwithstanding, we can offer some general remarks about the nature of valuing. First, to value an object is to devote one's time to it in a substantive way. A nature lover is someone who spends a significant amount of time in nature, but more than that, he appreciates and enjoys nature, studies it, seeks to understand it, protects it, and enhances it. All of these actions are "modes of valuation," ways of valuing nature. Second, to value nature, as Wallace noted, is to be emotionally invested in it: being disposed to be joyful at its celebration, saddened and (I will argue) indignant at its destruction.[17] In addition to emotional engagement, valuing involves deliberative engagement: to value nature is to see it as a source of practical reasons (Seidman 2009). Importantly, it is to "see" the object of value as a source of practical reasons, though not necessarily to judge it so. We can value what we judge to be of no value, and we can see an object as a source of practical reasons even if we judge that it is no such thing. However, normally we will not only see what we value as a source of practical reasons but also believe it to be so. The nature lover will be disposed to see certain considerations as reasons for action: he will be inclined to see the fact that it is a nice day as a reason to go hiking and the possibility of new condominiums in the wildlife reserve as a reason to write his congressman.

To value an object is to be subject to a set of norms that specify, in virtue of the nature of the object, the kinds of emotional and deliberative dispositions one must possess. The perceived reasons involved in valuing are pro tanto reasons. If we value nature, we will see the fact that we can invest time in it by hiking and protecting it as a reason to do so. But these reasons can be defeated: we also value our children, and this will curtail the time we invest in nature. And just as our reasons to care about nature must be balanced against other reasons, so also our emotional engagement with nature will be curtailed by our emotional engagement with other objects of value. If we have just lost a child, then the destruction of a large portion of the rainforest may not greatly affect us. Normally such indifference to nature would show one was failing to abide

[17] Cf. Anderson (1993, p. 11): "Romantic love involves feeling grief when the beloved dies, despondency at her lack of reciprocation, exultation at her confession of reciprocal love, jealousy when her affections are turned to another, alarm at her being harmed." I will argue that we should add "and resentment when the beloved is freely disvalued."

by the norms of valuing nature. However, in our case, our emotional detachment is not at odds with our care for nature so long as we are *disposed* to a high level of emotional engagement.[18]

To value X, then, is to have a complex attitude constituted by a set of deliberative and emotional dispositions, specified by the norms that govern how to properly value X. In contrast to the person who values nature is the person who merely judges nature to be valuable, judges that it would be proper to have this complex attitude, but does not exemplify it himself. In this way we can judge objects to be of value without actually valuing them.[19] To judge that something is valuable without actually valuing it does not, arguably, signify a failing on the part of the agent; there are simply too many valuable things for us to value them all. I believe that an understanding of current cosmological theories is valuable, although this is not something I value myself. I have instead devoted myself to the pursuit of other valuable activities. Valuing X and judging X to be valuable are constituted by distinct attitudes and dispositions: valuing involves an amount of devotion to and emotional engagement with the object valued, while judging valuable requires only the recognition that such devotion and emotional attachment is appropriate or intelligible or worthwhile.

My focus in this paper, however, is with objects that give rise to moral values, and valuing these is not optional. The objects at the heart of morality are categorical in that they set ends for us. While much of what we value depends on unique, contingent features of the valuer—her preferences, circumstances, and so forth—objects that give rise to moral values demand our respect simply in virtue of our being rational agents capable of valuing. Thus to fail to value these objects is to fail to value what we *ought* to value. This is the first plank in my defense of blame. Some objects must be valued. The second plank concerns the proper way to value such objects. As mentioned earlier, the proper way of valuing an object depends on the nature of that object. Valuing persons ought to differ, in certain respects, from valuing nature. However, all objects that give rise to moral values require that we defend and protect them. The importance, centrality, and inescapability of moral values demand that we take these objects seriously, and part of what it is to take them seriously is to defend and protect them.[20]

Therefore, we must possess the complex attitude, constituted by emotional and deliberative dispositions, proper to valuing objects of moral values. And among the norms that govern how to properly care about morality is the requirement that we defend and protect moral values: we must stand up for and

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[18] I return to this point at the end of section 4.

[19] Judging valuable and valuing can come apart in both directions: we can judge something to be valuable and not care about it, and we can care about things that we judge to be of no value. Cf. Seidman (2009) and Watson (1987a).

[20] Cf. Raz (2001, p. 167), who argues that we must respect everything of value, where this includes defending and protecting these values.

safeguard moral values against those who flout them. With this understanding of the nature of value and valuing in hand, let us return to our query about the value of blame.

4. The Value Account of Blame

We must value objects of moral value, and so doing requires that we defend and protect them. What exactly are the objects at the heart of morality is a substantive, first-order, ethical question. I will assume that humans, nature, and animals are among the valuable objects at the heart of morality. The reason for making this assumption is to afford us concrete examples by which we can further understand the value account of blame.[21]

To value persons is to be disposed to experience a range of emotions in response to how their lives go and to see certain considerations as reasons. If I value persons, I will see the unavoidable misfortune of some as reason to help them. I will see reason to protect those who cannot protect themselves and to afford them opportunities to direct their lives in accordance with their hopes and aspirations. If I value nature, I will be disposed to experience joy when new laws are passed to secure its protection and sadness when a precious forest is lost to fire. And according to the value account of blame, we must be disposed to experience and express blame in response to those who *freely* disvalue objects of moral value. This is the heart of the value account of blame: blame is a required mode of valuation in response to free disvaluations. I will elucidate the condition of free disvaluations in a moment, but let us first consider the details of this account more closely.

First, on my account, the connection between valuing and blaming looks in the opposite direction as familiar Kantian accounts of the value of blame.[22] Kantians often maintain that we should blame agents for acting wrongly, for otherwise we would fail to take the blameworthy agent seriously and in this way would fail to value the blameworthy agent.[23] This is a powerful claim, but I believe that it is a mistake to place it at the heart of an account of the value of blame, for it looks in the wrong direction. Our primary concern should be the victim, not the blameworthy agent, and consequently, it would seem that if blame is of value, we should be able to explain this on the basis of valuing the victim and not only the wrongdoer. To clarify, I am not denying the Kantian

[21] Thus, nothing I say turns on any of the specific values I identify. The reader is encouraged simply to replace any of the values on the list with the values she judges to be at the heart of morality.

[22] Thanks to Ben Mitchell-Yellin for pointing this out to me.

[23] Bennett (2008), Korsgaard (1996), and Scanlon (2008, pp. 167–68) all emphasize the importance of blame for taking the wrongdoer seriously.

thought; indeed I am inclined to accept it. However, I am denying that this thought should be the only or even the central explanation of the value of blame.

According to the value account of blame, the standards of value play a dual role with regard to blame: they specify both who is blameworthy and how to respond to the blameworthy agent. It is by freely violating the standards of value that one becomes blameworthy. This much is familiar in accounts of blame.[24] Part of what is distinctive in my theory is that the standards of value also specify how we ought to respond to the blameworthy agent: according to the standards of value we should be disposed to experience blame toward the agent who has disvalued an object of moral value and be disposed to take there to be pro tanto reason to express blame. Consequently, in failing to blame the murderer, we (all things being equal) fail to value the victim. It is not just that these responses are one way of valuing out of many; rather, one who fails to care for such objects in these ways fails to value these objects. To fail to blame, then, sometimes constitutes a form of disvaluation. It is in this sense that it can be right to blame: blaming is a necessary way of properly valuing moral values. But it is also good to value such objects, and consequently, as blame is essential to valuing them, blame is good. Therefore, it would be wrong and bad to forswear blame.

There are three main components to the value account of blame. First, on this account, blame is a required mode of valuing objects of moral value. Second, blame is a response to free disvaluations of objects of moral value. Third, the standards governing how to value such objects specify who is blameworthy and how to respond to such disvaluations. But why think the standards of valuing make blame a required response? Why do they require that one go beyond sadness and grief to the dark attitude of blame? I believe that the answer lies in understanding the significance of free actions and the specific requirements of the standards of value. Our proneness to the reactive attitudes in response to free disvaluations is rendered good and right partly by the fact that free actions function as, or express, value judgments. In freely throwing my trash on the ground in Yosemite National Park, I am, whether or not I intend to, making a value claim about Yosemite in particular and nature in general. I am claiming that nature is not altogether that valuable, if valuable at all, and so it really does not matter whether I drop my trash here or a few feet away in the trashcan. The person who destroys a Picasso painting because the owner will not sell it to him expresses value judgments about the painting, himself, and the owner. He expresses an extreme narcissism, making it clear that the frustration of his desires is not to be tolerated. Embedded in this action is a bloated view of his own value relative to other persons. He takes his happiness to be much more important than that of others and that the owner deserves little to no consideration. Moreover, he fails to respect the

[24] See especially Murphy (1988) and Hampton (1988a).

value and beauty of the painting, subjecting its worth to the whims of his fancy. Free actions therefore have meaning and serve to express a take on what is valuable.

It is because free disvaluations challenge the status of an object as valuable (or its degree of value) that we are to respond with blame, for the standards of value require that we acknowledge, defend, and protect what is of value. In freely insulting your wife, I am expressing a judgment about her worth. In freely disvaluing her, I am claiming that she is not to be valued. Blame (or guilt) serves both to acknowledge the wrongness of my action and to counteract my claim because it too plays an expressive role. In experiencing and expressing blame toward me for insulting your wife, you too are expressing a judgment concerning her value. In particular you are standing up for your wife and defending her value in the face of a challenge, making clear that you value her and that my actions are inconsistent with her value as a person. Moreover, by responding in this way, you are protecting your wife's value. You are making it clear to her and others that she is of value, and this is the first step in protecting her from further mistreatment. Disvaluing a person can lead the blameworthy agent, the victim, and third parties to doubt the victim's value; such disvaluing can lead (perhaps unconsciously) to a sense that the person is not valuable after all or that valuing her is consistent with treating her in this insulting fashion. Such beliefs can lead to further disvaluing. In experiencing blame you register the act's inconsistency with your wife's value and resist the subtle growth of contempt for her. You make it clear that you will not stand for or allow such treatment of her. In expressing blame, you make a case for her value to others. To fail to blame me would be to fail to take your wife seriously, implying that what I did was "no big deal." It is for reasons such as these that failing to blame me would be to fail to value your wife.

We now have the beginnings of a defense of the value account's main contention, namely that blame is a mode of valuation required by the standards of value. The connection between blame and value obtains because of (1) the significance and status of free action and (2) blame's being essential to how we defend and protect moral values. We will further explore these claims in the remainder of the paper.

5. The Meaning of Free Action and Blame

As Scanlon (2008, pp. 122–31) insightfully points out, free actions carry the significance they do because of their connection to reasons: free actions are (among other things) actions performed for reasons. A free action's significance varies with the reasons for which it was performed. My burning a Picasso painting because of a dare carries a very different meaning from my burning a

Picasso painting because of how cruelly it represents women. Free actions, moreover, constitute a take on what is of value—what is valuable, the degree and importance of the value, and so on. For example, my destroying the Picasso painting because of its misogynist overtones suggests that a proper appreciation of women is more valuable than the beauty of the painting's composition. Moreover, my action expresses that appreciation of the value of women is more important than whatever pleasure museum-goers might glean from viewing it. Indeed, our actions are so saturated with meaning that it will often be impossible to fully appreciate their significance.

Free actions constitute takes on what is of value, although they do not necessarily represent an agent's deepest commitments or all things considered view of what is of value. Our free actions can represent a take on value that we ourselves repudiate. This is exactly what happens in cases of weakness of will. A person's cheating on his wife suggests that fidelity to his wife is less important than his own sexual gratification. It represents this take on value even though he does not judge this to be the case. Instead he succumbs to temptation, acting weakly. The significance of free actions that we are concerned with does not obtain in virtue of free actions revealing the agent's "true self."[25] Frequently our free actions constitute a specific take on what is of value that we, all things considered, reject, and it is precisely this failure to live up to what we care about that is a cause for guilt and remorse.

Many nonfree actions also constitute such a stance. A young child or a person born addicted to methamphetamines can perform actions that represent objectionable takes on value. All intentional action appears to constitute such value judgments. Nevertheless, because these actions are not free, the standards of value do not require us to respond with blame. Blame is limited to free actions because only these actions both carry the relevant significance and have the status of belonging to the agent in a way in which it is *fair* or *appropriate* to hold the agent responsible for the action. In this context, "free action" is action for which it is appropriate or fair to hold the agent responsible.[26] Thus blaming is a fitting response to free disvaluations in light of the latter's significance and status.

Blame is a fitting response to free disvaluations partly because of the meaning expressed in those actions. However, according to the value account of blame, blame is not simply a fitting response but a required one. The following is a promising line of defense of this claim. First, the standards of value

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[25] I am not denying that free actions can have meaning because they represent our true selves. Rather, I am attempting to locate a different sense of the meaning of free actions than others have emphasized. Notable examples of philosophers who offer theories along this other line are Frankfurt (1971) and Watson (1975).

[26] One might offer an additional rationale for limiting blame to freedom: namely that only free actions represent an agent's take on what is of value. I will not argue for this stronger claim.

require that we defend and protect moral values. Second, only blame plays these expressive and functional roles. Therefore, blame is a required mode of valuation. That the standards of value require us to be disposed to defend and protect moral values is clear. The notion of defense here is forensic: to defend moral values is to make a defense of the object's status as a moral value. Blame responds to challenges to an object's status issued in the free disvaluation and makes a case for its value. To fail to stand up for the moral value can involve you in a kind of complicity: your failure to act can be a form of acquiescence to the judgment expressed in the free disvaluation. To fail to stand up for the value also shows a failure of recognition: it is precisely our understanding of the importance of the object of value and the significance of the free disvaluation that moves us to experience and express blame. Moreover, to defend moral values involves expressing our condemnation of the act: by standing up and defending moral values we make it clear that we disagree with and will not stand for that kind of action.

The standards of value also require that we protect moral values. Protection can of course take many forms. We can, for example, protect humans by passing legislation forbidding mistreating them or requiring provision of certain goods necessary for their flourishing. The nature of the protection afforded through blame is more informal. The unpleasant side of blame is especially important here as it imposes a kind of sanction on the blameworthy agent, subjecting him to the unpleasantness of being the object of scorn or rebuke. However, in a more constructive mood, blame can help move the blameworthy agent to a realization of the value he flouted, bringing him to feel remorse and eventually to repent of his wrongdoing (cf. Bennett 2008). The hope is that this transformation will lead him to avoid disvaluing the moral value and thus enhance its protection. Moreover, publicly blaming the agent can serve to bring others to a recognition of the value of the object in question or to sustain the beliefs of those who already recognize it as valuable. As Jean Hampton rightly observes, we protect what we value (1988b, p. 141). Disvaluations challenge the value status of an object, and this challenge can raise doubts in the minds of the person disvalued as well as those who witness the wrong. Blame counteracts and can protect against these false beliefs. It is a way of declaring to others that this form of behavior is not to be tolerated and thus can help people to recognize the moral status of the object or sustain their true beliefs in the face of a challenge.

One might object that the justification offered here applies only to expressed blame, offering no reason to think that it is good to experience *unexpressed* blame. But this objection has little to recommend it. First, even unexpressed blame can serve to defend and protect moral values. Blame helps to undergird our own beliefs about moral values in the face of challenges. Just as expressed blame makes a case to others for the value of the object, unexpressed blame makes a case to ourselves for the value of the object. We often

wonder whether, doubt that, or reject the claim that an object is of value. Blame can weigh in and direct us in this line of inquiry. These comments are especially applicable when blame is self-directed: guilt defends the status of the object to and protects against further mistreatment of the object by ourselves. According to many accounts of the nature of emotions, blame (or anger) is a particular mode of construing a situation that renders certain facts salient, such as that a wrong has been committed, that someone has been freely disvalued, and that this needs to be recompensed (cf. Roberts 2003, p. 203; Hurley and Macnamara 2010). Second, if one grants that the actions characteristically motivated by the emotions that constitute blame (resentment, indignation, and guilt) are good and right, it is hard to envision how one might still find the emotions themselves objectionable. I cannot imagine what would be the basis for endorsing the characteristic activities of blame while rejecting their characteristic motivations.

The blame curmudgeons will likely grant my first premise, that valuing entails that we must protect and defend moral values, and yet deny my second premise, that the only way we can do this is by blaming. That is, they will argue that we can defend and protect objects that give rise to moral values through alternative means. But can we really value, for example, persons and yet not be disposed whatsoever to blame those who wantonly disvalue them? Or fail to see any reason whatsoever to rebuke these blameworthy agents? Or always fail to express our indignation to the person disvalued so as to affirm her status as valuable? I find such ideas hard to square with my experience of value. It is precisely because people value things so much that they are likely to become especially exercised when these objects of value are freely disvalued. Part of what it is to *recognize* that some object is of value is to be disposed to blame those who freely disvalue it and to take there to be reason to express this blame.

But can't sadness play the same expressive role? Two features of sadness—what it responds to and what it expresses—prevent it from playing the same role as blame. Sadness is fundamentally a response to the loss of or harm to an object we value, whereas blame is a response to the object's being *freely* disvalued. We respond with sadness when an object we care about is lost or harmed, regardless of the cause of the harm; the harm may have been brought about by a nonrational agent (such as a storm), by a rational agent albeit through an accident (I tripped and knocked over your wine rack), or by a rational agent who freely disvalued the object (I purposely knocked over your wine rack because of jealousy). Sadness *only* tracks the fact that loss or harm occurred; it is not a response to free disvaluation qua free disvaluation and so cannot protect and defend moral values in the ways identified above.

Sadness also, and most important, does not have the dimension of condemnation required for defending and protecting moral values. This is because sadness does not indicate that anyone has violated the standards of value. It indicates only that an object of value has been harmed, but not all harms are

disvaluations. One can feel saddened as a result of an action that one judges to be right. We can imagine a father grief-stricken over a child's incarceration, even though he recognizes this to be the right thing to do. The sadness of the father is responding to the loss of the child, not to a disvaluation of the child, since, as the father himself recognizes, there is no disvaluation in this case. It is clear that the grief is a response to the loss of the child not the value judgment expressed in the imprisonment.[27] Experiencing and expressing sadness does not indicate to others that an object of moral value was treated in an objectionable way and thus does not help to safeguard the value against further mistreatment.

One of the difficulties with discerning that sadness cannot play the requisite roles is its deep connection with blame. Whenever blame is appropriate, so is sadness. This is because blame responds to free disvaluations and disvaluing is a kind of harm, thus rendering sadness also appropriate. Nevertheless, sadness is not an apt substitute for blame since it does not carry the condemnatory aspect embedded in blame. Sadness expresses our care and is a response to loss. Blame expresses the value of the object and is a response to free disvaluation.

I have argued that the standards of value require that we be *disposed* to experience and express blame when we become aware of or perceive a free disvaluation of an object of moral value. But to fail to experience or express blame in such circumstances is not always a form of disvaluation. This point is nicely captured by Sir Walter Scott's Francis Osbaldistone, who has just discovered both that he must leave the woman he loves forever and that his father's livelihood is in peril. Francis reflects:

> I was deeply grieved at my separation from Miss Vernon, yet not so much as I should have been, had not my father's apprehended distresses forced themselves on my attention; and I was distressed by the news [of my father's ruin], yet less so than if they had fully occupied my mind. I was neither a false lover nor an unfeeling son, but man can give but a certain portion of distressful emotions to the causes which demand them, and if two operate at once, our sympathy . . . can only be divided between them. (Scott [1815] 1995, p. 209)

Scott's point is not simply descriptive but normative. Francis claims that, in light of human limitations of the store of emotions, the fact that he neither felt as distressed at the prospect of losing his lover nor the ruin of his father is not evidence that he is failing to properly care for these persons. In normal circumstances his failure to experience these emotions with greater intensity would be such evidence. But in this case, his emotions are rightly divided and

[27] Or if it is a response to the value judgment expressed in the imprisonment, this is because the parent recognizes the validity of the judgment, and this is additional cause for sadness.

thus inevitably lessened. Similar remarks apply to blame. If I have just received a phone call informing me that my wife has been in a horrific car accident and is being airlifted to a hospital with a specialist, then the fact that I fail to respond with or express blame to the person who has just made an extremely rude comment is pardonable. These reflections drive us toward two conclusions. First, the standards of value do not entail that we must *always* respond to free disvaluation with unexpressed and expressed blame. Rather they require that we be disposed to so respond. Second, the standards do entail that not any reason for omitting to blame will do. If I do not express blame at the person who freely insulted your wife simply because I do not feel like getting involved, then (all other things being equal) I have failed to value your wife. I have placed my own time and comfort over her worth.

We need not always stand up for what is of value when it is challenged. The vicissitudes of life will often focus our attention in a single direction, making it understandable that we do not take on the cause of standing up for certain items that are of value. But a life wholly devoid of blame will be a life that fails to take seriously what is of value, and such a failure will itself be a form of disvalue. Blame, then, is not to be neglected.

6. Conclusion

I have sought to articulate and explore a distinctive understanding of the connection between value and blame in hopes that this connection would serve as a basis for a response to the blame curmudgeons. According to the value account of blame, blame is an essential mode of valuation, and I argued that it is blame's constitutive connection to value that makes it good and right, for if we fail to blame when blame is appropriate (all things being equal), we fail to value what we ought to value. This account of the connection between value and blame remedies deficiencies in Sher's and Wallace's accounts by making blame *essential* to valuing. I offered the beginnings of a defense of this account that appealed to the expressive nature of free action and blame, as well as the standards of value (among which are requirements to defend and protect moral values), in order to render intelligible why there exists this connection between blame and value. It is, I argued, because free action and blame express takes on what is of value that blame is such a fitting response to free disvaluation. And it is because blame is essential to defending and protecting moral values that it is not merely a fitting response but also a good and required one. Sadness cannot replace blame in this expressive role since sadness is a response to loss, not to free disvaluation. Although more must be said to substantiate these claims, I offer the value account of blame as a promising line of response to the blame curmudgeons.