Moral Dimensions

PERMISSIBILITY, MEANING, BLAME

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Blame

In this chapter I offer an account of blame, based on the distinction between permissibility and meaning presented in the preceding chapters. Blame is a familiar aspect of moral experience, but it is surprisingly unclear exactly what it involves. Accounts of blame tend toward two ideas. The first idea is essentially evaluative: that to blame someone is to arrive at a negative assessment of his or her character. The second is punitive: blame is a kind of sanction, a milder form of punishment. Neither of these interpretations seems to me to fit the facts of our moral experience. The alternative account presented in this chapter seems to me to be a better fit, although it also has aspects that will no doubt strike some as revisionist.

On the interpretation I offer, blame normally involves more than an evaluation but is not a kind of sanction. To blame a person for an action, in my view, is to take that action to in-
dicate something about the person that impairs one's relationship with him or her, and to understand that relationship in a way that reflects this impairment. This account seems to me to fit with much of what we say about blame, and with the significance it has for us. It also explains various facts about what I call the ethics of blame: about who can be blamed, who has standing to blame, and why we should blame—why blame is not an attitude we would do better to avoid.

Questions about the nature of blame lie behind the philosophical controversies about freedom and responsibility. Many believe that moral blame is appropriate only for actions or characteristics that are under an agent's control, and some maintain that agents have control in the relevant sense only if their actions and characteristics are not due to things outside of them, such as their genetic makeup, their social circumstances, and other environmental factors. But it is not commonly explained why this should be so. Whether blame requires freedom, and what kind of freedom or control it requires, surely depends on what blame is. If, for example, blame is merely a kind of negative evaluation, then it is not clear why control or freedom should be required. I will identify what seem to me to be the strongest reasons for thinking that blame presupposes a strong kind of freedom, and explain why these do not apply to blame when it is understood in the way I propose.

What Is Blame?

In most cases, to decide that what a person has done is blameworthy is in part to decide that he has behaved wrongly—that
he has acted in a way that is contrary to standards that we all have reason to regard as important and normally overriding. These can’t be just any standards. Failing to meet the standards of athletic or artistic performance, or making mistakes in arithmetic, are not in themselves grounds for blame. Such standards do not have the right kind of importance, and their violation does not, in itself, have the right kind of significance to make blame appropriate.

It is not easy to say exactly what kind of importance standards have to have in order to be moral standards. I doubt whether there is a single, more substantive account of distinctively moral importance that covers all the cases people commonly refer to as “moral.” But I believe that, at least in a large and central class of cases, distinctively moral standards have to do with the kind of concern that we owe to each other. The importance of moral standards, at least in these cases, thus lies in the importance for us of our relations with other people. I will concentrate on the kind of blame that is associated with wrongness of this kind, generally leaving aside interesting questions about blame for violating other kinds of standards that may be called moral.

When someone is blameworthy, it is generally for doing something that was wrong. But wrongness and blame can come apart. The blameworthiness of an action depends, in ways that wrongness generally does not, on the reasons for which a person acted and the conditions under which he or she did so. So it can be appropriate to say such things as, “Yes, what she did was certainly wrong, but you shouldn’t blame her. She was under great stress,” or “You can’t blame him. He thought he was acting for the best.” Good intentions, and con-
ditions such as stress, can be relevant to blame even when they are not relevant to the rightness or wrongness of what the person did. It can also make sense to blame a person even when what he did was not impermissible. For example, it can be appropriate to blame a person who has done what was in fact the right thing if he or she did it for an extremely bad reason.

Something similar to blame may also apply to people who, for perfectly good reasons, do something that turns out very badly for others. A political leader, for example, may choose what there is good reason to think is the best action, but it may nonetheless have disastrous consequences. If it does, then she may find it difficult to live with herself, and others, too, may regard her as a pariah if, for instance, her choice led to the death of thousands. The same is true in more personal cases, as in an example offered by Thomas Nagel. A person who, while doing something he has every reason to believe is quite safe—driving down his street—kills his own child or a neighbor's child through a freak accident, may understandably find it difficult to live with the fact that he is the one who killed her. As Nagel observes, this is not a case of moral blame. It is quite natural to reassure such a person by saying that he is blameless. Nonetheless, what such a person is likely to suffer seems somehow akin to blame, in a way that needs to be explained.

Nagel distinguishes this phenomenon, which might be called objective stigma, from cases of genuine moral luck. He writes:

However, if the driver was guilty of even a minor degree of negligence—failing to have his brakes checked
recently, for example—then if that negligence contributes to the death of the child, he will not merely feel terrible. He will blame himself for the death. And what makes this an example of moral luck is that he would have to blame himself only slightly for the negligence if no situation arose which required him to brake suddenly and violently to avoid hitting a child. Yet the negligence is the same in both cases, and the driver has no control over whether a child will run into his path.³

I will refer to cases in which blame appears to vary in this way as instances of moral outcome luck. An adequate account of blame should either explain how blame can vary in the way that these examples suggest or else give a convincing explanation of why it should appear to do so even though it does not.

If wrongness and blameworthiness can diverge in these ways, what does a judgment of blameworthiness amount to? It might be said that to blame someone for something is to count it (negatively) as part of his "moral record."⁴ But what is this record and what are we doing in keeping it? Is it just a record of what the person did that was wrong? If so, how could what he did be wrong but not be part of his record?

It is also natural to say that blaming someone is a matter of assessing his or her character, whereas wrongness has to do only with the action he or she performed. There is clearly something right about this. But although blaming may have to do with character, it also has to do with an action—at least in many cases we blame a person for something. So it might be said that to blame a person for something is to take that action as showing something negative about that person's character.⁵
This has the advantage of explaining why blame should depend on the agent's reasons for performing an action, and on the conditions (such as great stress) under which an action is performed, since both of these are relevant to the question of what one can infer from an action about the character of the agent.

By itself, however, this view does not explain the distinctive weight that moral blame seems to have. Unless we say more about why we are interested in this kind of character assessment, it may seem to be a pointless assignment of moral "grades." Our interest in people's character might, of course, be prudential. We have an obvious interest in deciding whom we can rely on, for example. But this does not capture all that blame involves. It is not unreasonable to continue to blame someone for an action even when we are quite certain that the opportunity to display the relevant kind of character flaw is unlikely ever to recur.

Moreover, the "character assessment" account of blame, by itself, leaves us with no way to explain the phenomenon of moral outcome luck. The driver in Nagel's example has exactly the same character—has shown the same degree of carelessness—if a child runs out in front of him or if one does not. So if there is any difference in the blame that is appropriate in the two cases, blame must involve something other than the assessment of character.

One alternative view, suggested by Peter Strawson, identifies blame with reactive attitudes such as resentment and indignation. An account of this kind has several advantages over one that understands blame in terms of disapproval or character assessment. First, and most important, it avoids the
charge that blame involves a pointless assignment of moral grades. As Strawson says, it is an essential component of normal interpersonal relations that we should be susceptible to feeling indignation and resentment toward those who, we believe, fail to show the kind of concern for others that these relationships demand. Second, this account can allow for the ways in which the content of blame varies. Different relationships involve different standards. (In Strawson’s terms, they demand different forms of “good will.”) And different reactions are appropriate, depending on one’s relation to the person who fails to show the concern demanded by these standards.

But this view, by itself, still fails to explain the plausibility of moral outcome luck. If the reactive attitudes that blame involves are reactions to the attitudes of others as manifested in their conduct—for example to the concern for the interests of others that their actions manifest—then moral outcome luck still seems inexplicable.

The account of blame that I offer is like Strawson’s in seeing human relationships as the foundations of blame. But it differs from his view in placing emphasis on the expectations, intentions, and other attitudes that constitute these relationships rather than on moral emotions such as resentment and indignation. Briefly put, my proposal is this: to claim that a person is blameworthy for an action is to claim that the action shows something about the agent’s attitudes toward others that impairs the relations that others can have with him or her. To blame a person is to judge him or her to be blameworthy and to take your relationship with him or her to be modified in a way that this judgment of impaired relations
holds to be appropriate. To understand this proposal, it will help to begin with an analogy between impersonal morality and more personal relationships, such as those that hold between good friends or lovers.

Suppose I learn that at a party last week some acquaintances were talking about me, and making some cruel jokes at my expense. I further learn that my close friend Joe was at the party, and that rather than coming to my defense or adopting a stony silence, he was laughing heartily and even contributed a few barbs, revealing some embarrassing facts about me that I had told him in confidence. This raises a question about my relationship with Joe. Should I still consider Joe to be my friend? This is not just a question about his future conduct. It may be that circumstances like those prevailing at the party—the particular combustible mix of personal and chemical influences—is very unlikely ever to recur. And it may be that Joe feels very bad about the way he behaved and that this also indicates that his conduct is unlikely to be repeated. The question is not just about how he will act in the future but about what happened in the past, and what it indicates about Joe's attitude toward me and about the nature of our relationship.

Possible responses, on my part, to what Joe has done fall into three general categories. First, I might consider whether I should continue to regard Joe as a friend. An answer to this question is a judgment about the meaning of Joe's action—about what it shows about his attitude toward me, considered in relation to the requirements of friendship, and about the significance of that attitude for our relationship. Second, I might revise my attitude toward Joe in the way that this judgment holds to be appropriate. I might, for example, cease to
value spending time with him in the way one does with a friend, and I might revise my intentions to confide in him and to encourage him to confide in me. Third, I might complain to Joe about his conduct, demand an explanation or justification, or indicate in some other way that I no longer see him as a friend.

These three forms of response are closely linked, but there is a degree of independence between them. Insofar as one's relations with a person are constituted by the reasons one takes oneself to have for treating him or her in certain ways, a judgment of blameworthiness, taken seriously, marks a change in that relationship and hence is a form of blame. When one has made such a judgment, however, there remains the question of how seriously one is going to take it, and how far one is going to go in adjusting one's attitude toward the person in the ways that this judgment claims are appropriate. I might reach the conclusion that Joe's conduct makes it inappropriately to go on thinking of him as a friend but nonetheless continue to treat him as one in the ways just mentioned. This might be irrational or self-deceptive, since it would involve a failure to hold to the attitude I myself judge to be appropriate. It might also indicate a kind of weakness or servility on my part. I may be dependent on Joe and crave his attention to a degree that leads me to behave in a demeaning manner. Even if I decide that Joe is not really a good friend and revise my attitude toward him accordingly, however, it is a further question whether I will express this to Joe, and in what way. Self-respect may require that I speak up for myself, rather than merely walking away from our relationship in silence.

To understand blame in general it is important to distin-
guish between responses of the three kinds I have listed and, in particular, not to simply identify blame with a response of the third kind. The conclusion that someone is blameworthy for something he or she has done is a response of the first kind: a judgment that the action shows that person to hold attitudes that impair his or her relations with others. To blame the person is to hold the attitude toward him or her that this impairment makes appropriate. In the examples I have discussed, blaming someone involves revising one's attitude toward him or her. But blameworthy conduct can also simply confirm the negative conclusion we have already reached about a person's attitudes toward us and others, in which case to blame is just to reaffirm the attitudes that this judgment holds to be appropriate. The attitudes blame involves may include intentions to complain to the person, and to demand an explanation, justification, or apology, but these need not be present in every instance of blaming.

To explain and defend this account of blame, I need to say more about the ideas of a relationship, the impairment of a relationship, and the responses that this impairment can make appropriate.

**Personal Relationships and Impairment**

A relationship is constituted by certain attitudes and dispositions. Central among these are intentions and expectations about how the parties will act toward one another. But relationships also include intentions and expectations about the feelings that the parties have for one another, and the con-
considerations that they are disposed to respond to and see as reasons.

The variety of attitudes that relationships involve is clear in the case of friendship. To be friends with a person involves such things as intending to give help and support when needed, beyond what one would be obligated to do for just anyone; intending to confide in the person and to keep his or her confidences in return; and intending to spend time with the person when one can, and to “keep in touch.” Being a friend involves actually being disposed to act in these ways, not just having an abstract intention to do so. It also involves being disposed to do these things for the right kinds of reasons, not only out of a sense of obligation but also out of a certain kind of concern and affection for each other.10

In addition to these intentions and dispositions to behave in certain ways (to fulfill what might be called the obligations of friendship), being a friend involves being disposed to certain feelings: to take pleasure in the friend’s company, to hope that things go well for the friend and to take pleasure in their going well when they do. A friend is not obligated to have such hopes and feelings, but a person who fails to have them, if a friend at all, is a deficient one.

If a friend is under consideration for a good job, or has bought a lottery ticket, it would be disloyal not to hope that they get the job or win the prize (leaving aside the possibility of conflicting loyalties). To hope that these things will happen, or even to see oneself, as a friend, as having reason to hope that they will happen, need not involve believing that there is more reason for one’s friend to get the job, or win the prize, than for someone else to do so. One has reason to hope for
these things simply because the person is one's friend, but these reasons need not be based on what one judges to be objectively best overall.

In a true friendship the attitudes just described are mutual. Mutuality is not a further, independent feature of friendship but is presupposed by the attitudes that constitute it. You are disposed to confide in a friend because you suppose that he or she is disposed to keep those confidences, and also, at least as important, because you suppose that the friend cares about you and about how your life is going. Similarly, the particular kind of pleasure that you take in being with a friend presupposes that he or she takes pleasure in the interactions as well. If this is not so—if the other person is bored, or merely indulging you—then the whole thing is founded on a mistake. This is true not only of friendship but of less significant relationships as well, such as with the person from whom you regularly buy your vegetables, who always asks about your children and commiserates about the difficulties of parenthood. If this person is moved merely by the desire to keep his customers coming back, or if he would shoot you if he had any reason to, then you are making a mistake in the kind of pleasure you take in these interchanges. To put this in terms I have used earlier: the meaning of the interactions between the parties is an important aspect of personal relationships. The quality of these relationships thus depends on the reasons for which the parties are disposed to act and expect each other to act.

It is important to distinguish, here, between the normative ideal of a relationship of a certain kind, such as friendship, and particular relationships of that kind, which hold between particular individuals. The normative ideal of a particular
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kind of relationship specifies what must be true in order for individuals to have a relationship of this kind, and specifies how individuals in such a relationship should, ideally, behave toward each other, and the attitudes that they should have. It thus sets the standards relative to which particular relationships of this kind exist and the (higher) standards relative to which such relationships can be better or worse, and can be seen as impaired.

Most personal relationships are contingent and conditional in various ways. Our relationships with neighbors, coworkers, and the tradespeople we deal with are obviously conditional on the contingent fact that we regularly interact in these ways. The same is true, in a less contingent way, of the relations between parents and children. But as the case of friendship shows, relationships can also be conditional on the attitudes of the parties involved. Friendship depends on the parties’ intentions and expectations but also on the fact that they take pleasure in each other’s company and have things in common, such as enjoying some of the same pursuits or having shared memories that are important to them (important both on their own and because they are shared).

Relationships that are conditional in these ways can come to an end without either party’s being at fault. Friends can grow apart without either of them having been in any way disloyal or a “bad friend.” They may just change, become interested in different things, and cease to value being together. These changes may bring a friendship to an end, but not in a way that is analogous to blame. A friendship might also be said to be “impaired” when one party is hit on the head and becomes comatose, or loses his memory. Such cases may call for
some revision in the parties' expectations and intentions. But
a judgment that a friendship has been impaired in this way
is not in itself a judgment of blameworthiness, or analogous
to one.

These two cases ("drifting apart" and physical injury) differ
in ways that bring out the way in which they both differ
from impairment of the kind I am concerned with. The peo-
ple who have drifted apart may thereby cease to be friends,
but physical injury does not, or should not, bring friendship
to an end. The difference between the cases follows from
the standards governing the attitudes that friendship involves.
These standards must allow for friendships to end blamelessly.
Friendship would be an oppressive relationship if it had to last
forever, no matter what. But insofar as friendship involves
having special concern for each other, the standards of friend-
ship also require one to provide support and understanding
when a friend is injured, rather than writing off that friend as
"no fun anymore."

Assuming that the friend of the injured person remains
loyal, neither the way in which a friendship is impaired by such
an injury nor the way in which a friendship ends when the par-
ties drift apart involves violation of the standards of friend-
ship, and this is what differentiates these cases from the kind
of impairment I am concerned with. Impairment of the kind I
refer to occurs when one party, while standing in the relevant
relation to another person, holds attitudes toward that per-
son that are ruled out by the standards of that relationship,
thus making it appropriate for the other party to have attitudes
other than those that the relationship normally involves.

This could be what happens in the example of my friend
Joe's behavior at the party. At the extreme, I might conclude that Joe was not really a friend after all. To conclude that this is so would be to conclude that I have reason to revise my expectations and intentions in certain ways: to decide not to rely on or confide in Joe as one would in the case of a friend, and not to seek his company, to find it reassuring, or to have the special concern for his feelings and well-being that one has for a friend's. To revise my intentions and expectations with regard to Joe in this way, or in some less extreme way, is to blame him. I might also resent his behavior, or feel some other moral emotion. But this is not required for blame, in my view—I might just feel sad.

However, the conclusion need not be this radical. If other aspects of the friendship remain intact, then the relationship can continue in an impaired form. If it does, there may be changes in the ways that the injured party has reason to behave. For example, if I have been making fun of you behind your back, then you have reason to be less free in revealing yourself to me than you would normally be with a friend. Or the shift may be purely one of attitude: you have reason to see my professions of concern for you in a different light—not, perhaps, as entirely disingenuous, but as nonetheless to be taken with more qualification than before.

I have been concentrating so far on the point of view of a person whose relationship with another is impaired by that other party's deficient attitudes, and I have been considering the attitudes and intentions that this impairment makes appropriate for a person in that position. But we should also consider the responses that are appropriate for a third party who
is not a participant in the relationship. Like the injured friend, a third party can *disapprove* of the guilty party, and judge that he or she is not a good friend. But this deficiency has a different meaning for parties in these two positions.

Because the injured party is a participant in the friendship, its impairment has special significance for him. It raises questions about the meaning of his (past and future) interactions with his friend and about his responses on those occasions. Such questions do not have the same significance for a third party. This difference can be brought out by considering the idea of betrayal. The judgment that you were betrayed by your friend—a judgment that what he did was an instance of a certain kind of wrong—is one that either you or a third party can be in a position to make. But taking seriously the fact that one has been betrayed involves more than making this judgment, and more than making this judgment plus feeling a certain emotion (a special kind of resentment, perhaps). It involves seeing one's relationship with the person as changed and one's interactions with the person as having different meaning, seeing oneself as having different reasons governing those interactions and having the intention to be guided by those reasons. A third party can judge that the action of betrayal has this meaning for you, but because he is not a participant in the relationship to begin with, he is not in a position to adjust his attitudes toward the guilty party in the relevant way. Not being a friend, he cannot have the attitudes—the revised expectations, intentions, and assignments of meaning—that a wounded friend properly has.

This discussion of friendship and blame has brought out
five elements that are central to the general account of blame that I am offering:

1. The *ground relationship* (in this case friendship), which provides the standards relative to which the attitudes that an agent's action reveals constitute an impairment. These standards also determine the appropriateness of various responses to this impairment.

2. The *impairment* of a particular relationship by certain attitudes of one of the parties.

3. The *position of the responder* (the person doing the blaming) relative to the agent and the impairment. The responder might, for example, be a friend who was betrayed, a friend of that friend, or a disinterested third party.

4. The *significance of the impairment for the responder*. This is a function of the impairment and of the responder's relation to the agent, action, and impairment.

5. The *response* (blame) that is appropriate. This depends on the impairment and its significance for the responder, given his or her position. It is determined by the standards involved in the ground relationship. In the examples discussed, this response involves revising one's attitude toward a person.

In the case of friendship it is relatively clear what the ground relationship is. But in the general moral case, it is not so clear what relationship we are talking about when we say that to blame a person is to conclude that his relations with others are impaired. Do we have a relationship with every total stranger whom it makes sense to blame? My answer is that in a general sense we do. But this requires further explanation.
The Moral Relationship

The idea that we have a relationship with everyone in the world sounds odd for at least two reasons. The first is that we naturally take the term ‘relationship’ to refer to a particular relationship, like the friendship between two individuals, which is constituted by the friends’ special attitudes toward each other. Morality is not a relationship in this sense. Rather, it is a normative ideal, like a normative ideal of friendship that specifies attitudes and expectations that we should have regarding one another whenever certain conditions are fulfilled.

In the case of friendship and most other personal relations, these conditions involve the parties’ attitudes toward one another, and it is in virtue of these attitudes that their relationship exists—that they are friends. In the case of morality, however, the relevant conditions do not concern the parties’ existing attitudes toward one another but only certain general facts about them, namely that they are beings of a kind that are capable of understanding and responding to reasons. Insofar as one assumes that any relationship must, like friendship, be constituted by the parties’ attitudes, this provides a second reason for thinking it inappropriate to say that morality defines a relationship that holds even between total strangers. But this assumption is mistaken. The conditions in virtue of which relationships exist, and the relevant normative standards therefore apply, do not always involve the parties’ attitudes toward one another.

The relationship of parents to their children is a leading example: normative standards requiring care and concern for one’s children apply simply in virtue of the fact that they are one’s children, and depend on one for their care. Similarly, in
my view, morality requires that we hold certain attitudes toward one another simply in virtue of the fact that we stand in the relation of "fellow rational beings." It requires us to take care not to behave in ways that will harm those to whom we stand in this relation, to help them when we can easily do so, not to lie to them or mislead them, and so on. A morally good person will have standing intentions to regulate his or her behavior in these ways. These intentions concern our behavior toward people in general, not simply toward specific individuals whom we are aware of or could specify. They concern behavior toward people, whoever they may be, whom we happen to interact with in various ways, such as people who may be injured by our driving, or who ask us for directions, or who need our help in other ways.

Beyond these intentions, good moral relations with others involve being disposed to have certain other attitudes. These include, in general, being disposed to be pleased when we hear of things going well for other people. We are not morally obligated to have these feelings, just as we are not obligated to be pleased when things go well for a friend. But one is deficient as a friend if one does not have such feelings, and it is a moral deficiency to hope that things go badly for others, even strangers, or to be pleased when they do.

These attitudes and dispositions define what I am calling the moral relationship: the kind of mutual concern that, ideally, we all have toward other rational beings. Calling this a relationship may seem implausible because the attitudes that make it up are so abstract—directed toward people in general, rather than toward specified individuals. It may seem to make no sense to speak of our having attitudes toward people we
have no knowledge of, or about what their attitudes may be toward us, of whom they are similarly unaware. But when we do become aware of others and are in actual or potential interaction with them, we generally assume that even if they are strangers they will manifest at least the basic elements of this ideal concern. We assume that this default relationship of mutual regard and forbearance holds between us and the strangers we pass on the road or interact with in the market. When someone does not manifest this concern, it is this relationship that is the standard relative to which our actual relation with them is seen as impaired.

To judge individuals to be blameworthy, I am claiming, is to judge that their conduct shows something about them that indicates this kind of impairment of their relations with others, an impairment that makes it appropriate for others to have attitudes toward them different from those that constitute the default moral relationship. To blame someone is actually to hold modified attitudes of this kind toward him or her. ¹⁴

It is relatively easy to say what this type of impairment consists in. It occurs when a person governs himself or herself in a way that shows a lack of concern with the justifiability of his or her actions, or an indifference to considerations that justifiable standards of conduct require one to attend to. What is more difficult is to describe the kind of response on the part of others that this impairment makes appropriate.

In the case of friendship, if a person lacks the attitudes required to be a friend, then in the extreme case this makes it appropriate not to regard him or her as a friend—to abandon, or not to form, the intentions and attitudes that friendship involves. In less extreme cases, a friend’s deficiencies make it ap-
propriate to qualify these intentions and attitudes, or perhaps to withhold some of them.

One view, which might be called moral retributivism, holds that an analogue of this more extreme reaction is appropriate in the case of the moral relationship: when people's moral deficiencies are great, the proper response on our part is to see even their most basic moral claims on the rest of us as limited and qualified. This view will hold that even our intentions not to kill or harm others are appropriately suspended toward those who fail to manifest these intentions toward others.\(^\text{15}\)

I believe that this view is substantively mistaken. We would, ideally, like our moral relationship with others to be mutual. This relationship is fully realized when we are moved to act in a way that is justifiable to others and this concern is also reciprocated. But, in contrast with the case of friendship, the basic forms of moral concern are not conditional on this kind of reciprocation. Even those who have no regard for the justifiability of their actions toward others retain their basic moral rights—they still have claims on us not to be hurt or killed, to be helped when they are in dire need, and to have us honor promises we have made to them. Special circumstances, such as self-defense, may sometimes justify abrogating these rights, but moral deficiencies do not justify their general suspension.\(^\text{16}\)

This poses a problem for the view of blame that I am advocating. If neither the basic concern with justifiability to a person nor the intention to respect that person's most basic substantive moral claims is modified by a person's deficiencies as a participant in moral relations, what room is there for
blame as I am describing it—that is to say, for any modification, on our part, of the intentions, dispositions, and expectations that constitute our moral relationship with such a person? One possibility is to find room for this modification in the realm of moral emotions or similar attitudes. According to a view of this kind, what moral deficiencies make appropriate is just moral disapproval (a kind of grading) or more specific moral emotions such as resentment (and, in the case of one's own deficiencies, guilt).

I do not deny that these attitudinal responses can be appropriate, and that they are elements of blame. But an account of blame that focused only on these elements would be too thin. Blame also involves other modifications of our attitudes toward a person, including changes in our readiness to interact with him or her in specific ways. There is a range of interactions with others that are morally important but not owed unconditionally to everyone. If a person has no regard for the justifiability of his or her actions to others (or, despite professing such a concern, constantly sees things in a way that gives weight only to his or her own interests), then it is quite appropriate to refuse to make agreements with that person or to enter into other specific relations that involve trust and reliance. In addition, friendship and the other specific relationships I have been discussing presuppose adequate moral relations. So deficiencies that impair moral relations also impair, or rule out, these specific relationships. Blame therefore involves a suspension, in varying degrees and in varying ways, of one's readiness to enter into these more specific relations, and suspension also of the friendly attitudes that signal a readiness to do so.
There is also room for modification in our intention to help others in certain ways. Some duties to aid are unconditional. Even murderers and rapists have a claim on us to be rescued when they are drowning or are in danger of bleeding to death after an accident. But normal moral relations also involve a general intention to help others with their projects when this can be done at little cost, and we need not have this intention toward those who have shown a complete lack of concern for the interests of others. It would be wrong of us to go out of our way to kick over their sandcastles, so to speak, but we need not offer them our shovels.

The attitudes on a person’s own part that impair his or her relations with others also change the meaning of friendly greetings or expressions of helpfulness. Rather than expressions of moral identification, connectedness, or solidarity, they become one-sided actions, cases of turning a blind eye to something that ought not to be ignored. Such expressions may even be demeaning to the person who holds them, in the way that it is demeaning for a person to continue to treat someone as a loyal friend after learning that the “friend” has betrayed him or her.

Impairment of a person’s moral relation with others can also make it appropriate to suspend the dispositions to feelings that I mentioned above as part of the normal moral relationship. The fact that a person has behaved very badly toward you or toward others can make it appropriate not to take pleasure in that person’s successes, and not to hope that things go well for him. Not being disposed to such hopes and feelings in regard to a person is not, however, the same thing as judging it to be good that things go badly for him or her (or even judging
One should also bear in mind that the distinction between blame and blameability is a difficult one to make. The concept of blamefulness is one that is often used to describe a person's willingness to accept responsibility for their actions. However, it does not necessarily imply that the person has done anything wrong. A judgment of blamefulness is one that anyone can make, however, it is not a measure of the actual wrongdoing. The person may have done something wrong, but the judgment is based on the person's willingness to accept responsibility for it. Therefore, it is not always clear whether a person has done something wrong or not. One should also consider the possibility that the person may have been unaware of the wrongdoing. In such cases, the judgment of blamefulness may not be appropriate.
tentions to have regarding their future interactions with the agent, and what meaning to assign to those interactions.

The appropriate response will thus depend on the person's exact relation to the blameworthy action and the attitudes it reveals. Different responses will be appropriate, for example, if one is oneself the victim or intended victim of the action, or one is someone whom the agent apparently would see as an appropriate object of similar treatment (someone of the same gender or race as the victim, for example).¹⁹

Because the content of blame depends in this way on the significance of the agent and the agents' faults for the person doing the blaming, its content is attenuated in the case of agents who lived long ago and have no significance for or effect on our lives. We can judge such people to be blameworthy, but such a judgment has mainly vicarious significance, as a judgment about how it would have been appropriate for those closer to the agent to understand their relations with him.²⁰ It may imply, for example, that those who interacted with this person had good reason to withdraw their intentions to trust or rely upon him. But the idea that we ourselves blame him for what he did can sound somewhat odd. As our distance from a person increases, blame becomes simply a negative evaluation, or attitude of disapproval, and even this evaluative element can seem pointless grading unless we have some particular reason to be concerned with what the person in question was like.

Disapproval may be all that blame can amount to for someone taking an entirely detached and impartial point of view.²¹ But we need not always have a detached attitude to-
ward agents who are distant from us in space and time. We can be injured by the wrongful action of someone we have never met and never will meet; perhaps someone who lived long before we were born. In such a case it makes sense to say that we blame that person for bringing about the injury. This might be explained by saying that there is a special relationship, in the relevant sense, between perpetrators and their victims. In a way this is right, but it cannot be the whole story, since that relationship itself cannot be the one that is "impaired" by what the perpetrator does. Rather, the victim's relation to the perpetrator is impaired relative to the standard relationship between persons generally, insofar as the perpetrator's action showed a failure to have the concern for the welfare of others that is part of what we all owe to each other.

Being the victim of an action by some stranger makes it the case that that person has had a distinctive role in our life, as the author of an event that we have come to terms with. It thus gives our attitude toward that person a distinctive significance, even if we will never interact with that person in the future and therefore do not need to decide how to behave toward him or her. The fact that some historical agent, such as Hitler, caused terrible harm for people we know, or their families, can also give blame greater significance. As I will argue below in the section on the ethics of blame, it can be blameworthy—that is to say, impair our relations with others—not to blame agents who harmed them. In such cases even the evaluative element in blame is far from pointless.

The distinction between the moral seriousness of the impairment indicated by what an agent does and the significance
of this impairment for a person who stands in a certain relation to the agent also provides the basis for an explanation of the phenomenon of moral outcome luck. Consider first a case of what I called above objective stigma.

Person A always drives carefully. Nonetheless, one evening as A is driving home, a child runs in front of his car and is killed.

The fact that A is the one who killed the child has an effect on what it is like for others, especially the child's parents, to interact with him in normal ways. It changes what it is like for the parents to stand next to A at the bus stop, to say hello to him in the morning, or to rely on him, as a member of the neighborhood babysitting pool, to take care of their surviving children. This is so even if they fully believe that A was not at fault, and blame is therefore not appropriate. My account shows how objective stigma is similar to blame even though it is not the same thing: both involve a modification of one's relations with a person, a change in the meaning of one's interactions. Consider now genuine cases of moral luck.

Person B is disposed to be reckless (not to be sufficiently concerned about the risks that his conduct poses to others), but he never actually endangers anyone because he never has the occasion to engage in risky conduct.

Person C has the same disposition as B, but she drives a car. She drives recklessly but, through sheer good luck, injures no one.
Person D has the same characteristics as B and C, drives in exactly the same manner as C, but is unlucky and kills a child.

B's relations with others are impaired by his lack of regard for their safety. He is open to criticism on this account. But (assuming that his recklessness does not affect other aspects of his relations with others) the fact that he would drive recklessly if he drove gives people little reason to revise their attitudes toward him. It affects his relations with them very little if at all.

C, by contrast, actually endangers people. So her defects of character have a significance for them that B's do not. It therefore makes sense for them to revise their attitudes toward C: not only to stay out of her way and not loan her their cars, but also to regard her not as a "fun person" whose foibles should be shrugged off, but as person whose priorities are a threat to them and need revision.

D's faults have greater significance than C's for those who are affected by his driving: he is not only the person who killed a child but also the person whose recklessness led to the child's death. The fact that his fault has played this significant role in their lives raises a greater question about how they are going to understand their relations with him.

Given that the difference between D's case and C's is due to factors beyond their control, one might ask how the blame that is appropriate in the two cases can be different. If blame were just an evaluative attitude toward an agent's character, then we would, as Nagel says, have no reason to blame them
differently.\textsuperscript{22} After all, there is no difference in their character, or in the way it is expressed in what they do. Based on the view of blame I am proposing, however, one can have reason to treat the cases differently.\textsuperscript{23} As I interpret it, blame is not a mere evaluation but a revised understanding of our relations with a person, given what he or she has done. Blame is therefore a function not only of the gravity of a person’s faults but also of their significance for the agent’s relations with the person who is doing the blaming. The outcome of D’s action may be due in part to bad luck, but it is also due to a fault on D’s part. It therefore increases the significance of that fault for those who have been affected by it. What is involved in D’s case is thus not just the phenomenon involved in C’s case plus that involved in A’s. Rather, the causal outcome of D’s action multiplies the significance of his fault. In A’s case, by contrast, there is nothing of moral significance to multiply.\textsuperscript{24}

The differences, and similarities, in the appropriate reactions to A and to D can be brought out by considering the role that apology, or something like it, can have in these cases. Saying “I’m sorry” is appropriate even in A’s case. But in his case this would not be an apology but an expression of regret at the tragic outcome of his action. Its function would not be to admit a fault but rather to reaffirm that there was no fault—no lack of concern on A’s part for the safety of others—and to invite the parents of the child to acknowledge this, thereby helping to ease the difficulty in their relationship caused by the unlucky outcome. In D’s case, on the other hand, a genuine apology is called for. Its function would be to acknowledge his fault, to acknowledge the significance of this fault for those af-
fected by it, and to express the wish to repair his relationship with them. 25

It is common to speak of blame as a form of "moral appraisal" or "moral evaluation," and to speak of praise and blame as if they were positive and negative versions of the same thing: similar attitudes with opposite valences. But as I am suggesting we should understand blame, it is not just a negative evaluation or appraisal of a person but a particular understanding of our relations with him or her. 26 And if praise is the expression of a positive appraisal, it is not the opposite of blame as I interpret it. This raises the question of what the positive correlate of blame would be.

The clearest example is gratitude. Gratitude is not just a positive emotion but also an awareness that one's relationship with a person has been altered by some action or attitude on that person's part. Sincerely felt, this entails having the reciprocal attitudes that this changed relationship makes appropriate. Typically, this involves a readiness to respond in kind—for example, a greater readiness to help a person who has gone out of her way to help you, should the occasion arise.

The things that one can properly be grateful for are not limited to actions. One can be grateful for a person's concern when one is ill or going through some difficult and stressful event. One's relationship with a person can be changed by the fact that she felt this special concern, even if her expression of it did not help one in any way.

It can be appropriate to be grateful to a person, and more disposed to help her, simply because she tried very hard to help you, even if her efforts did not succeed. This raises the
question (parallel to the question of blame and moral outcome luck, discussed above) of whether it is appropriate to be more grateful to a person who succeeded in helping you than to someone else who tried just as hard to do so but failed, through no fault of her own. If gratitude were, like praise, a form of evaluation, then it would seem that there can be no difference in the appropriate responses in these cases. However, my relationship-based view allows room for a difference, since being benefited as a result of someone’s exceptionally generous attitudes (like being harmed by his recklessness) changes one’s relationship with him or her. But in what way should this make a difference in one’s response? My own sense is that it does not make a difference in the degree to which one should have an increased readiness to help him or her in return. The question is whether something more is called for in the case of successful help—a gift, perhaps, or some other acknowledgment of the benefit one has received.

Some Strengths and Weaknesses of My Account

The account that I have been presenting explains several aspects of the relation between wrongness and blame. It explains why not every instance of wrongness is blameworthy and not every blameworthy action need be impermissible. It also explains why the blameworthiness of an action depends on the reasons for which a person acted, in ways that, as I have argued in earlier chapters, impermissibility does not. The agent’s reasons for acting (and the fact that other considerations did not count for him as reasons against so acting) are what con-
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stitute his attitude toward others, and what have the implications
that blame involves, in the account I am offering.

It follows from the way in which blame depends on an
agent's reasons that conditions under which an agent acted,
such as extreme stress or fear, can affect blame insofar as they
affect the degree to which the action reflects the agent's actual
attitudes. It also follows that blame does not come merely in
degrees of more or less but varies in countless ways, corre-
responding to the different ways in which our understanding of
a person and his attitudes toward others can vary. As I have
already pointed out, the content of blame—the implications
that an agent's conduct has for one's relations with him or
her—can also vary from person to person, depending on one's
relation to the agent and action in question.

The question of what our relations with a person are or
should be—what attitudes we should have toward her—directs
our attention to facts about her that are naturally called as-
pects of her character. So the account I am offering explains
why blame should be seen as involving assessment of a per-
son's character. But by placing this assessment within the con-
text of our relations with a person, my account explains why
this assessment is not pointless grading, or purely prudential
calculation. It also explains why only some aspects of char-
acter are relevant grounds for blame. Lack of ambition may be a
fault of character, but in the account I am proposing it is not in it-
self grounds for blame by others. We might blame a person
for his lack of ambition because this led him to let his family
down, but this would actually be blame for violating his family
obligation. Blame for the character flaw itself makes sense only
for someone who stands in some relation to the person for which this characteristic is important: a coach or teacher, for example, might blame a student for lack of ambition. Blame in such a case would naturally consist in some modification of the attitudes that the relationship involves, such as a decreased willingness to help the student perfect his or her skills.

One can also blame oneself for one's own lack of ambition, or for other faults or transgressions. The very idea of blaming oneself may seem at first to present a difficulty for my account of blame, which emphasizes the defective character of the blamed person's relations with others. But this is not in fact a problem. To begin with, my account can easily allow for the fact that one can take oneself to be blameworthy for lacking proper concern for others. One can make a judgment of blameworthiness about oneself as well as about anyone else, friend or stranger. In all these cases this is a judgment about how the blamed person's relations with others are impaired. But when the person is oneself, and the judgment is about one's own relations with others, specifically about the attitudes they have reason to hold toward one, this gives rise to special concern, regret, and a desire to change things. These responses constitute blame of oneself: because of one's own attitudes toward and treatment of others, one can no longer endorse one's own feelings and actions, but must instead endorse the criticisms and accusations made against oneself by others. One cannot, so to speak, be one's own friend.

This kind of estrangement is uncomfortable, and it is therefore tempting to avoid it by continuing to endorse one's attitudes—to love oneself wholeheartedly—despite the recognition that one is blameworthy. "What a rascal I am!" such a
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c person might say, with an indulgent smile. This kind of diver-
gence between a judgment of blameworthiness and the adjust-
ment of attitude that it calls for is the first-person analogue
of a person who continues to be friends with someone who
treated her badly. But in this case the divergence—the failure
to take one’s own faults seriously—can impair one’s relations
with those one has wronged, and thus itself be blameworthy.
One can also blame oneself for faults, such as lack of am-
bition, even when they do not affect others. This is like the
moral self-blame I have just been discussing, in involving a
kind of self-estrangement. But it differs because it arises sim-
ply from an impairment of the ground relationship with one-
self—an inability to “count on” oneself—rather than from an
impairment of relations with others.
There are also other forms of blame, dependent on par-
ticular ground relationships, that are continuous with moral
blame but go beyond it. A shared commitment to a value or a
cause, for example, can establish a special connection with
someone whom one has never met, perhaps because this per-
son lived long ago. Such a person may have a special place in
our understanding of our own lives, as the person who de-
veloped a certain idea or who advanced in some way a goal to
which we are committed. If we learn that in fact this person
failed to live up to this value, or failed to fulfill the obligations
of a member of this group, our relation with him or her will be
impaired, the impairment being measured in comparison with
the relation that we would hope or expect to have with some-
one with whom we share this value, history, or commitment.
We will feel that this person was not a solid member of the
group but was instead a slacker, a renegade, disloyal, or even a

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traitor—these all being species of blame relevant to these special relations.

The dependence of blame on relationships also explains what is special about blame of young children. We do not blame young children for things such as rudeness or self-centeredness in the same way that we would blame an adult. This is not because the relevant standards of conduct are different for children. We would not say to a child, “It is all right to hit people now, since you are a child, but don’t do it later when you are grown up.” The difference lies in the dimension of blame, not the permissibility. In some cases this difference can be explained by the fact that young children cannot be expected to understand the consequences of what they do—to foresee what these consequences will be or to understand their significance. For example, a child may not be able to understand why a certain remark is particularly rude or hurtful. So the willingness to make such remarks does not indicate the same deficiency in a child as it would in an adult. But this cannot be the full explanation. Even when children understand full well why they should not do something, they may not be blamed for doing it in the same way that an adult would be.

I believe that the explanation lies in the ways in which our normal relationship with a child (our own child or even someone else’s) differs from our relationship with normal adults. Our relationship with children is an unequal one because of the child’s relative lack of development, including moral development. It is a tutelary relationship: we are to understand that children are “just learning” and to help them grow. Our relationships with children thus lack certain elements of our relationships with normal adults—we do not ex-
pect to be able to rely on children in certain ways, for example, and if they fail to be reliable, our relationship with them is not impaired. We may engage in expressions of blame toward them—or at least use words that normally express blame—but these words have a more purely educative function and do not indicate the same thing that they would in the case of an adult. If a young child hits people, for example, or can’t keep a secret, this does not raise the question of whether we should write him off as someone we will not associate with. Knowing that we can’t rely on a person not to do these things would constitute impairment of our relationship with an adult but not, at least not in the same way, with a child.

Some may object to the account of blame I am offering because it seems to them to be too weak or mild. Blaming someone, they would say, involves something more than taking one’s relationship with that person to be “impaired” in the way I have described. If one has this reaction when considering blame from the point of view of the person doing the blaming, I suggest considering matters from the point of view of someone who is blamed. The realization that you have done something that gives others good reason to revise their understanding of their relationship with you, and that they also take this view, is a serious matter. Moreover, this analysis seems to fit well with the experience of guilt: feeling guilty for something one has done is plausibly understood as feeling that it has impaired one’s relationship with certain people. In my experience there is nothing weak or mild about such feelings.

Another natural objection to my view is that it does not account sufficiently for the fact that blame is always for some action. On the interpretation I offer, a conclusion that some-
one is blameworthy is a conclusion about the significance of that person's attitudes for his or her relations with others. The person's willingness to perform a certain action can reveal these attitudes and thus provide evidence for such a conclusion. But we can reach conclusions about people's attitudes on other grounds, such as what they say, or approve of. So blame, as I am describing it, can be independent of any particular blameworthy action. (A purely evaluative account of blame, such as Hume's, has this same implication.)

There may be some tension here between my view and some of the things we are inclined to say about blame. But our ordinary ideas about blame are not entirely consistent on this point. It makes sense, for example, to say that we blame a person for being hard-hearted toward others, even if we base our assessment on his frequent remarks rather than on anything he has done. In such a case it is not just the remarks that we blame him for but also the attitudes they express, which would be blameworthy whether or not they were expressed (as is evident in our feelings about our own unexpressed attitudes).

Moreover, even in my own view there are several ways in which a person's actions have a special status as grounds for blame. As Adam Smith writes, "We are capable, it may be said, of resolving, and even taking measures to execute, many things which, when it comes to the point, we feel ourselves altogether incapable of executing." Huckleberry Finn, for example, might well have maintained quite firmly that he would never help a runaway slave to escape, since that would be stealing. But when the occasion presented itself, he found that he could not turn Jim in. A willingness—or unwillingness—to act can
show something about a person that we could not be certain of on other grounds.

Actions also have a special role in making blame (as opposed to judgments of blameworthiness) appropriate. The significance of blame, as I have said, depends on one’s relation to the person being blamed. The fact that an agent has wronged a person gives that person and her friends and associates reasons to blame that agent that they do not have to blame other agents in the history of the world who are equally blameworthy. As I pointed out in discussing moral outcome luck, the fact that he has caused this harm gives that agent a special role in their lives. It raises the question of what attitude they are to have toward him and thus gives a point to their blaming him, a point that would not exist in relation to people with whom they have had no interaction.

The attitudes of a person with whom one has to interact on a regular basis can also raise this question, however, in a way that need not depend on a particular blameworthy action. We have to decide how to understand our relations with such a person, and what meaning to attach to our interactions. There can thus be a point to revising these understandings—to blaming the person—because of his or her attitudes, even if this is not blame for a particular action.

Blame is concerned with something that has already happened. It attributes a certain kind of significance to what a person has done. What has been done can’t be changed, but it is interesting to ask what, if anything, a person who is the subject of blame could do to modify, or even erase, the significance of what has happened. I have just mentioned the possibility of
reinterpretation, of arguing that the action does not have the significance claimed for it. But if no reinterpretation is plausible, what can be done to change things? This brings us to the question of forgiveness, and how it is possible. If my account of blame is correct, forgiveness involves the restoration of an impaired relationship, perhaps in modified form. What forgiveness requires is some change in attitude on the part of the blamed person that makes this restored relationship one that all parties can endorse.\textsuperscript{31}

It is a strength of my account of blame that it fits naturally with a plausible view of forgiveness. But this account of forgiveness shares a feature of my interpretation of blame that might seem to be an objection to both accounts, namely that they do not give a central role to moral emotions such as resentment. It may be thought that forgiveness is mainly a matter of putting an end to resentment and other hostile feelings—without these, there is nothing for forgiveness to do—and that, correspondingly, blame essentially involves having feelings of this kind. Both of these claims seem to me mistaken. If I “write someone off” as a person I am going to have nothing to do with, then I am blaming him, even if this is accompanied by no hostile feelings, perhaps because I regard him as not worth being angry at.\textsuperscript{32} And when someone has been “written off” in this way, even without anger or resentment, there is certainly something for forgiveness to do.

Is Blame Limited to Individual Human Agents?

The view of blame I am proposing can explain how and when it can make sense to blame agents other than individual hu-
man beings, such as countries, institutions, firms, or groups. Consider first, for purposes of contrast, the possibility of blaming inanimate objects. Suppose my basement flooded because the sump pump failed. If it turns out that this happened because a piece of debris became lodged in the pump, you might say that I should not blame the pump. This might be interpreted, in my view, as a claim that I should not take this failure as a reason for revising my attitude toward the pump, and the relevant attitude would be one of trust or reliance. If the pump had simply stopped working, then I would have had reason to revise this attitude, but in the present case, the suggestion is, I do not.

We do sometimes have sentimental feelings toward pieces of equipment that have provided us with long and "faithful" service, such as an old car that always starts in the morning, no matter how cold it gets. This is sentimentality because the only form of "trust" that applies in these cases, as in that of the pump, is mere expectation. Genuine trust is not mere expectation but expectation grounded in a supposed responsiveness to certain reasons, or at least feelings, such as loyalty, sense of duty, or concern for others' welfare. Cars can be reliable but not faithful, because they do not have feelings or respond to reasons. So with respect to inanimate objects, we can speak of faithfulness, trust, and, I would say, blame only in a metaphorical sense.

Blame of collective agents such as countries, corporations, and other institutions might be understood in a similar thin sense. But blame of entities of this kind is often taken to have more moral content than this. My account of blame entails that, in order for such blame to have moral content, we
need to attribute attitudes to these entities—attitudes such as feelings toward others or responsiveness to reasons—to which our attitudes toward them are in turn responsive.

It makes no sense to attribute feelings or emotions to countries or other collective agents, unless what is meant is just that most of the individual members have these feelings. Somewhat surprisingly, it makes more sense to see such entities, under appropriate conditions, as being responsive to reasons. This makes sense if two conditions are fulfilled. First, the entity must be a collective agent—that is, there must be procedural or other criteria for what constitutes a decision or action on its part. Second, those decisions or actions must exhibit the right kind of regularities: when considerations that provide a certain reason for action are present, the entity must generally act in a way that the reason makes appropriate. For this to be true nonaccidentally, the entity must be organized in a way that we can see it as receiving information of the relevant kind, and processing it in a way that regularly affects its decisions.

This account is entirely neutral as to the content of the reasons in question. They might be reasons having entirely to do with narrow goals that might be taken to define institutional self-interest. But responsiveness of this sort to reasons of the right kind, such as the safety or well-being of a certain group of people, could provide the basis for an attitude of trust toward a collective agent that would go beyond mere expectation. Actions that showed the entity to be indifferent to these reasons could then impair this trust and thus be the basis for blame, as I am interpreting it.

An example may help to illustrate this idea of blame of collective agents and its relation to blame of individual human
agents. Suppose that a ferry sinks and many people die. Two questions might be raised: Do we have grounds to blame the ferry company? Do we have grounds to blame any of the individuals involved? I believe that in this case these two questions correspond roughly to: Do we have grounds to suspend our trust of the ferry company (say, by revoking its license to operate ferries) because it is insufficiently responsive to relevant considerations (of safety)? And do we have grounds to suspend our trust in any of the individuals involved (for example by firing them or suspending their licenses to serve in the positions they occupy)?

These questions are parallel in structure but independent of each other to a significant degree. They might both merit the same answer, but need not do so. If the accident was due to an irresponsible decision made by one person (the head of maintenance, who allowed the ferry to sail when it was disabled, or the captain, who should not have left port given the bad weather), then this person should be blamed (perhaps fired or suspended from his job). The answer to the other question then depends on whether the company’s hiring and supervisory procedures should have screened out this person as unreliable, or whether it should have had fail-safe procedures in place that would have prevented a bad decision by one person from going into effect.

It is also possible that no individual was at fault. For example, perhaps the maintenance people who knew that the ferry was disabled did pass on this information in the proper way, but owing to bad internal communications within the company, the information never reached the people in charge of scheduling departures or the crew operating the ferry it-
self. If this was so, then it might show that the company is organized in a way that makes it untrustworthy—insufficiently sensitive to relevant information to be relied upon to operate ferries safely. But none of the individuals I have mentioned would be to blame. (It is a further question whether someone higher up in the company is properly to blame because he or she should have detected the flaws in the way information is handled within the company.)

Some wariness about the idea of relationships of trust and loyalty toward large organizations is certainly in order. Corporations spend millions trying to get us to have such attitudes toward them, and it may seem worse than sentimental to think of oneself as having a "relationship" with the manufacturer of one’s dishwashing liquid. But it is not implausible to say that we trust some companies not to put substances that there is reason to believe are harmful into their products, and that if we learned that some company knowingly did this, then we would no longer think of it as a respectable participant in the market. This kind of blame presupposes trust as the alternative, default relationship against a given relationship is measured.

We should distinguish here between two kinds of skepticism about collective blame. The first is skepticism about whether it ever makes sense to attribute attitudes to collective agents and to have reciprocal attitudes toward them ourselves. The second is skepticism about whether certain attitudes in particular—such as trust—are warranted toward particular collective agents, or toward collective agents of particular kinds, such as business corporations. Skepticism of the latter sort is certainly in order in many cases. But only skepticism of
the former kind is at odds with the possibility of blame of collective agents, understood in the way I have proposed.

The possibility of blaming collective agents seems clearest when one moves away from entities such as soap companies to collective agents that purport to be guided by noncommercial aims, and when one considers blame by individuals whose relation to these agents is something closer than that of consumer with producer. One might, for example, be pleased to work for a university or nonprofit organization because of its supposed commitment to certain values. But if it turned out that this institution was not responsive to the values it claimed to be serving, or even acted contrary to those values, then one would no longer have the same reason to “identify with it” to be willing to sacrifice for it, or to take pride in contributing to it. This would be a clear case of blame as I am proposing we should understand it.

A collective agent can be responsive to reasons in the sense that I have described, and hence a possible object of blame in the sense I am proposing, only if there are procedures through which it can make institutional decisions. Mere collections of people that do not meet this condition, such as ethnic groups, cannot be objects of blame on the account I am proposing. Since they do not make collective decisions that indicate responsiveness to reasons, there is no basis for attributing attitudes to such groups in anything other than the distributive sense, in which saying that the group holds certain attitudes is simply to say that most of its members do. This is just stereotyping.

Another issue to be considered under this heading is the possibility of blame in regard to nonhuman animals. Here
there are two questions: the possibility of blaming nonhuman animals and the possibility of blaming humans for their treatment of animals. With regard to the first question, blame is possible if there is a relationship that can be impaired by the animals’ conduct. A large part of the point of having pets lies in the relations of mutual trust and affection that we have, or imagine that we have, with them. This relationship also provides the basis for blame: if you decide that you can no longer trust your dog, or that your dog does not really care about you, this is a form of blame, in my view. But it is implausible to think that we have this kind of relationship with animals in general, including wild animals. So we cannot blame them for what they do to us.

The absence of such a relationship does not mean, however, that we cannot blame ourselves, or others, for our treatment of animals. Blame in these cases is a response to conduct or attitudes that impair our relationships with other humans, or with ourselves. If we believe that the suffering inflicted on animals in factory farming, for example, is something very bad, then our failure to respond to this disvalue can be the basis of guilt, as I am understanding it—it can impair our ability to identify wholeheartedly with our own attitudes and decisions.

The Ethics of Blame

One advantage of a relationship-based account of blame is that it can offer a good explanation of what might be called the ethics of blame—that is to say, of reasons why one can be open to
moral criticism for blaming someone or for failing to blame them.

Consider, first, cases in which a person is open to moral criticism for blaming. It is obviously objectionable to blame someone unfairly, that is to say on insufficient grounds, and it seems true to say, more generally, that one should not be too quick to blame others but should instead show a “generosity of spirit” and be understanding and forgiving. Some would go further, and say that blame is a moralistic and excessively “judgmental” attitude that it would be morally better to avoid altogether. Perhaps this is too saintly—more than most of us can manage—but it would be better to avoid blame if we could.

This view may draw some of its plausibility from the idea that blaming is a matter of judging others—giving them a low moral grade, so to speak. Understood in this way, blaming seems to involve adopting an unattractive position of superiority, as a moral judge of others. But blame does not have this character when it is understood in the way I am proposing. On the account I am offering, blame requires a moral judgment but it is not a matter of grading. It involves adopting attitudes toward a person that one takes to be called for by the significance that that person’s action has for one’s relationship with him or her. Since these relationships are in most cases symmetrical, blame involves no claim of superiority. Rather, it is made from within relationships that are generally between equals, and can even be required by these relationships.

Even when it is understood in this way, blame may still seem to have a disagreeable aspect. It may seem too much like
nursing a grudge, and therefore to be something it would be better to avoid if one could. But this is a mistake. Blame can be carried to excess, but the complete rejection of blame would rule out important relations with others. Moreover, this rejection itself is likely to involve objectionable attitudes of superiority or inferiority.

To see why this is so, it will be helpful to start from the analysis of forgiveness put forward by Pamela Hieronymi. She takes up the problem of how it can be possible to forgive someone without denying (1) that what the person did was wrong, (2) that he or she is the kind of being who is responsible for her actions, and (3) that you have standing to complain about being treated in such a way. Hieronymi argues that this problem can be solved, provided that the person who is to be forgiven acknowledges the wrongness of what she did and takes steps to reestablish her relations with the injured party on an acceptable footing.

The complete rejection of blame would amount to an expectation or requirement of unconditional forgiveness. In this case I can see no solution to the problem Hieronymi describes. Assuming that one's relationship with a person has requirements that he or she can fall short of, the rejection of blame would involve either denying that the other person's actions can have a meaning that impairs this relationship or denying that when this happens some adjustment in one's own attitudes is appropriate. The former (a denial of condition 2) involves an attitude of superiority toward the person in question (something like the attitude of a parent toward a very young child) and thus represents a failure to take that person seriously as a participant in the relationship. The latter (denial of
condition 3) involves adopting an attitude of inferiority that is demeaning to oneself.

Cases of this latter kind are instances of a broader class in which failing to blame an agent for an action impairs one's relations with the victim of that action. Suppose that Powers has done something terrible to Vincent. If you know of this, and understand what a terrible thing it was, then your relationship with Vincent is impaired if you do not blame Powers—that is to say, if your intentions and expectations in regard to Powers remain those that you would have toward any respectable member of the moral community. It is not enough just to acknowledge that what Powers did was wrong. Given what Powers has done to Vincent, you cannot have unimpaired moral relationships with both of them at the same time. Failures to blame that involve denial of Hieronymi's condition 3 are special cases of this broader phenomenon—cases in which the person who is blaming or failing to blame is also the victim.

Not only blame but also some public expression of blame seems to be called for in cases of mass murder or gross violations of human rights. This is why victims of such crimes, and their families, object so strongly when the perpetrators are not punished and continue to be treated as ordinary members of society. Their claim is not just that it is appropriate to feel indignation and resentment toward such people, or that it is appropriate that they should be made to suffer (although many victims may also want this). The point is also that there is something inappropriate about being asked to treat them as respectable fellow citizens, and to accept others' treating them in this way.
MORAL DIMENSIONS

It might be said that failure to blame is open to moral criticism in some cases because one owes it to agents to blame them, and in other cases because one owes this to their victims. But this is not quite right. What one “owes” these agents is not to blame them but only not to withhold blame on certain grounds. More exactly, it can be blameworthy (because it involves an impaired relation with a person) to excuse him or her from blame on the ground that he or she is not a responsible agent whose actions have meaning. And it can be blameworthy (can involve an impaired relation with a person) to fail to blame agents who wrong that person on the ground that he or she is not the kind of being that is entitled to complain of such treatment.

Whether or not failing to blame in either of these two ways is impermissible, both can be blameworthy. The attitudes that are taken to exclude blame in these cases are incompatible with important relations with others, or with oneself. When these attitudes are justified—when the person who might be blamed is in fact incapable of meaningful action, or when the person who might blame has no standing to complain—we do not have the relationships with the person that these attitudes would impair. But when these attitudes are unjustified, it is reasonable to object to them as impairing important relations (with oneself or others), which means that one is blameworthy for having them. This is an instance of the more general fact that not only wrongful actions but also attitudes themselves can be blameworthy (that is, can indicate impaired relations). It also illustrates the fact that one can be blameworthy for things that are not possible objects of choice, to which the question of permissibility therefore does not apply.
I have been considering the ways in which proper relations with agents or victims can rule out wholesale exclusion of blame. But there are also cases in which our relations with agents count against blaming them, or require one to qualify or modify blame. One such case is that of parents and their adult children. Even when parents must admit that what their grown son or daughter has done is blameworthy, it may be appropriate for them, as parents, to continue to offer sympathy and the right kind of encouragement, to look for the best in their offspring, and to be willing to trust them by "offering a second chance." These attitudes can be required of good parents even if strangers could properly regard their son or daughter as someone not to be associated with.

There is of course such a thing as being too willing to overlook the faults of one's children, as well as being insufficiently willing to do so. One might say that the proper course is determined by balancing the demands of one's relationship with one's child, the perpetrator, against the demands of one's relationship with the victim. But this metaphor of balancing is inadequate for a number of reasons.

First, seeing oneself as a parent (and as having reason to be a good one) involves seeing oneself as having reason to do the things I have mentioned: reason to offer sympathy and encouragement to one's offspring even (perhaps especially) when they have gone wrong, reason to look for the best in them, and reason to try to trust them by giving a second chance rather than "writing them off" as one might a stranger. Second, insofar as one has good reason to think of oneself as (normatively, not just biologically) a person's parent, and as having reason to be a good one, one actually has the reasons
just listed. Third, if what a person has done is sufficiently bad, it may undermine the antecedent of the previous statement: it may provide grounds for morally disowning him or her. But the relation of parenthood is quite robust and unconditional, less easily undermined than friendship and some other relations.

Fourth, the reasons I have mentioned limit what others can reasonably demand of a parent. Victims can reasonably ask parents to acknowledge the legitimacy of their claims, and the blameworthiness of what their offspring have done. But they cannot reasonably ask parents to distance themselves from their offspring in the way that a stranger could be expected to. So the incompatibility between normal relations with perpetrators and normal relations with their victims, which I mentioned above at the end of the discussion of Powers and Vincent, is modified when the person being asked to blame is a parent of the wrongdoer.

So, fifth, in determining what can be expected of a parent by way of blame, two questions need to be asked. We should ask whether the wrong is so serious as to undermine the normative relation of parenthood. And if it is not, we should ask what kind of loyalty and support a good parent is called on to provide. The answer to each of these questions depends, to some extent, on the blameworthiness of what the son or daughter has done, and therefore corresponds to the strength of the claims of the victim. But these are questions about the requirements and limits of the relationship of parenthood, rather than ones that are to be answered by balancing this relationship against some competing value.

The fact that one's relations with others may limit the
The previous statement: forgiving him or her.

The robust and unconditional friendship and some other

It is not possible to limit what others can reasonably claim, and what have done. But distance themselves could be expected of a parent to be asked. We are to undermine the trust that one does, or intends to do, but also of the reasons for which one does these things. Even if I have to go on letting my son use the car, this does not mean that I trust him. Rather, I let him use the car because I am obligated to do so, even though I do not trust him. I do not have the relationship with him that one could expect to have with a son of his age, one of sharing the use of family resources with a sense of mutual concern and responsibility. Our relationship is thus impaired, quite apart from any feelings of anger or resentment that I may have.

A similar analysis can explain how blame can be qualified by other special relationships, such as friendship, commitment to a common cause, and other bonds of loyalty. The an-
swers to the two questions listed in my fifth point above will of course vary in these cases, depending on the relationship in question. In particular, answers to the first question (about the possibility of undermining these relations altogether) are likely to be different than in the case of parenthood, since other relationships may be more readily undermined or canceled by what a person has done.

Cases arise frequently in politics in which willingness to blame can be inhibited by loyalty, and failures to blame can themselves be blameworthy. Political leaders and those who speak for political parties and other groups are often unwilling to condemn wrongful actions by their compatriots, or members of their own party or ethnic group. If they are quite ready to blame others outside their group for similar wrongs, this refusal to blame may be criticized as inconsistent or hypocritical. But it can also be objectionable in another way. Unlike the relation between parent and child, the relation between members of a political party does not provide good reason for qualifying blame. Members of a party may have reasons of group pride or political calculation for maintaining solidarity by refusing to blame or break with members of their group who have committed crimes. But these justifications, unlike claims of parental loyalty, are ones that the victims of these crimes have no reason to accept. Refusing to blame in these cases is therefore incompatible with normal moral relationships with these victims. That is to say, it is blameworthy, although it may be in some cases a shrewd but cynical political tactic.

The blameworthiness involved in these cases is not a form of collective guilt, although it might be confused with it. The point is not that those who refuse to condemn crimes
committed by members of their group thereby share the guilt for those crimes. It is rather that their relations with the victims are impaired in a related, albeit lesser, way. (It is lesser because a willingness to do unjustifiable things is a more serious impairment of one’s relations with the victims than an unwillingness to condemn members of one’s group for doing those things.)

I turn now from the question of who must blame to the question of who has standing to do so. I have argued that a judgment of blameworthiness is an impersonal one. It is a judgment that anyone can make, whatever his or her relation to the agents in question, while blame, as I interpret it, is more personal. Because it involves taking the view that a person’s attitudes (usually, the attitudes revealed in what that person has done) impair one’s relations with him or her, the content of blame varies, depending on what those relations are. The fact that blame depends on relationships in this way explains how a person’s standing to blame can be undermined.

This undermining is clearest in cases in which the person who would do the blaming has in the past treated the person who is to be blamed in ways that are as bad as what that person is being blamed for. To take a mild example, suppose we are friends and that I am often extremely late for our appointments, for no good reason, and have sometimes failed to show up at all without giving you any warning. Suppose that on some occasion you fail to appear for our appointment and I complain indignantly, saying that friends ought not to treat each other this way. What I am saying may be quite true, but I am not in a position to make this complaint. It is not just that I am being inconsistent, applying to you a standard that I do not
apply to myself, or that I am being hypocritical in applying to you a standard that my own conduct shows that I do not in fact accept. These things may be true, but there is also a further problem. I cannot claim that the attitudes revealed in your willingness to stand me up constitute an impairment in our relations, because the mutual expectations and intentions that constitute those relations were already impaired by my own similar attitudes, revealed repeatedly in my past conduct.³⁹ Things would be changed slightly if, when blaming you, I at the same time said, quite sincerely, that I was wrong to have behaved this way in the past. This would eliminate the inconsistency in my current judgments, but by itself it would not restore my standing to blame you. If anything could do that, it would have to involve something beyond just blaming myself, such as, at a minimum, giving convincing evidence that I recognize my faults and will behave differently in the future.⁴⁰

A person's standing to blame can also be undermined by what he himself has done to people other than the person being blamed. Suppose that you have injured others by lying to them and stealing from them. If I am also guilty of lying and stealing, this undermines my ability to blame you for your actions.⁴¹ As before, we might explain this by saying that it would be inconsistent or hypocritical of me to blame you. But something more is involved. In blaming you I would be holding that your willingness to behave in this way makes you someone toward whom I cannot have the intentions and expectations that constitute normal moral relations, such as the intention to trust you and rely on you. But insofar as these normal expectations and intentions are mutual, my own conduct already reveals me to be a person who cannot be a participant in these
relations. I cannot be trusted in exactly the same way that you cannot. So there is something false in my suggesting that it is your willingness to act in ways that indicate untrustworthiness that impairs our moral relationship.

G. A. Cohen identifies several other ways in which a person’s standing to blame can be undermined. He observes, for example, that if you have told me to do something, ordered me to do it, or knowingly facilitated my doing it, then although you can correctly say that what I have done is wrong and blameworthy, you cannot blame me for doing it. This can be explained in the same way as the cases I have just discussed. Your involvement in what I have done indicates a willingness to countenance the kind of thing I did. Therefore you cannot say that what stands in the way of your having possible moral relations with me is just my willingness to countenance such actions. Since these relations are symmetrical, your own willingness is just as much of an impediment.

Cohen also discusses a slightly different class of cases in which one person does something unjustifiable partly because another person has wrongfully deprived him of legitimate means for pursuing important goals. Even if this does not justify what the first person does, it bars the second person from blaming him for it. Suppose, for example, that you keep interrupting my meetings in order to force me to consider some complaint or proposal that you want me to consider. I may object to this behavior, quite correctly, on the ground that it is incompatible with the appropriate relations between us. I might say we ought to deal with such matters in a civil way, through the presentation of reasons, rather than by attempts at intimidation. I might be quite correct in saying this even if it
is also true that I wrongfully refused to consider your case earlier, when you presented it in a civil manner. But if I did refuse, then I cannot now blame you for your behavior even if it is blameworthy. This is because I cannot claim that it is simply your attitudes that impair our relations with each other.

Cohen suggests that this explains why some governmental officials may lack standing to condemn terrorists. Even if what the terrorists do is unjustifiable, despite the legitimacy of their political goals, it may nonetheless be true that governmental officials lack standing to condemn these actions if their governments have prevented the terrorists from pursuing their goals by legitimate means. (This would not mean that the terrorists were not blameworthy; they might be appropriately blamed by the families of their victims, for example.)

Similar considerations explain how the fact that a person was treated terribly as a child can modify the way in which we can blame him for things that he does later, even if they are also terrible. I do not think that blame is undermined by the fact that a person had no control over the factors that made him the kind of person that he is, or by the fact that, given the kind of person he is, he is incapable of understanding the reasons against acting the way he does. But even if the fact that a person was horribly mistreated as a child does not make it inappropriate to blame him by absolving him of responsibility, this factor can interact with blame in an important way. The fact that a person was mistreated can change our relation with him, in a way akin to those that Cohen discusses.

Gary Watson makes a similar point about the killer Robert Harris. Harris was unbelievably heartless and brutal. But when we learn how terribly he was treated as a child, Watson
says, "we are unable to command an overall view of his life that permits the reactive attitudes to be sustained without ambivalence . . . The sympathy toward the boy that he was is at odds with outrage toward the man he is . . . In fact, each of these responses is appropriate but taken together they do not enable us to respond overall in a coherent way." As Watson says, the facts about Harris’s past do not erase or diminish his blameworthiness. They do not change the fact that he is a heartless killer and someone whom we should never trust. But they add something to this description, complicating our response to him. It is not just that we feel sympathy for Harris (or for him when he was a child). It is rather that our revised relation with him is complicated by the fact that he was so ill-treated—not by us personally, but by "the moral community." This affects blame in something like the way that Cohen suggests. It does not undermine altogether our standing to blame, but it requires a more complex revision of our attitudes toward him. It raises a problem about the kind of blame that is called for.

### Blame and Freedom

Many people believe that blame presupposes freedom, and thus that it is never appropriate to blame people if all of their actions are caused by factors outside of them, over which they have no control. What is not commonly explained is why this should be so—or rather, what it is about blame that entails this requirement of freedom. In this section I will consider two possible explanations, which I call the *requirement of psychological accuracy* and the *requirement of adequate opportunity to avoid*. My aim is to examine these reasons for thinking that
blame requires some kind of freedom and to see how they apply when blame is understood in the way I am suggesting.

The requirement of psychological accuracy is straightforward. Insofar as blame depends on the reasons for which an agent acted, a judgment that blame is called for can be modified or undermined by factors that change our view of what those reasons were. Mistaken belief and coercion are factors of this kind. The fact that a person acted in a way that caused harm to someone else may seem to indicate a blame-worthy lack of concern for the other's interests. But the requirement of psychological accuracy bars us from drawing this conclusion if the agent reasonably believed (albeit mistakenly) that this action would not be harmful, or that it was necessary in order to prevent a much greater harm to the person.

Similarly, an agent who knowingly causes harm to another is blameworthy if he or she does this gratuitously, or out of indifference to that person's interest. But the agent may not be blameworthy, or may be subject only to a different and lesser form of blame, if she caused the harm only because someone threatened her with grave harm if she did not. So, for example, a bank teller faced with a credible threat of deadly force should not be blamed for giving cash to a bank robber.

It is sometimes said that coercion renders blame inappropriate in such cases because an agent acting under duress is not responsible for what she does. This seems to me a mistake. Coercion does not undermine responsibility; rather, what it does is to change what the agent is responsible for. A person who is coerced, such as the bank teller I mentioned, still acts, and acts for certain reasons. Such a person is thus responsible for what she does: that is to say, her action is fully attributable
to her. The bank teller may even deserve commendation for handling a dangerous situation in a calm and careful manner.

Rather than undermining responsibility, what coercion may do is to modify the permissibility of an action or the kind of blame, if any, that it makes appropriate. In the case of the bank teller, for example, the threat of harm may justify her handing over the money, which would otherwise be wrong. And even when coercion does not render what a person does permissible, it may alter the kind of blame that is appropriate. It is one thing to inflict harm on another person gratuitously, another thing to do so (even unjustifiably) out of fear of harm to oneself. The first kind of change (in permissibility) occurs because coercion changes the reasons there are for doing what the agent did. Changes of the second kind (in blameworthiness) occur because coercion changes in the reasons on which the agent acted.

The requirement of psychological accuracy can thus explain how lack of freedom can render blame inappropriate, or modify the kind of blame that is called for. But this explanation applies only when, as in cases of coercion, the lack of freedom alters the relation between an action and the attitudes of the agent who performs it. As many have pointed out, the lack of freedom that would be entailed by a general causal determinism need not have this effect. Even if our attitudes and actions are fully explained by genetic and environmental factors, it is still true that we have these attitudes and that our actions express them.

Compatibilists have sometimes concluded from this that it is simply a mistake to think that moral assessment requires freedom from determination by outside causes. Hume, for
example, argued that the tendency to think that moral assessment is incompatible with causal necessity results from a failure to distinguish between what he calls the liberty of spontaneity and the liberty of indifference. Hume believed that we lack the liberty of indifference: that our actions are governed by regular causal laws. Indeed, he said, moral appraisal depends on this, since it depends on there being regular connections between actions and the attitudes they express. But this does not mean that we lack the liberty of spontaneity—that we always act unwillingly. Laws of nature are not coercive.

Put in my terms, Hume seems to think that what he called “necessity” (causal determination of our actions) could undermine moral appraisal only by depriving us of the liberty of spontaneity, thereby conflicting with the requirement of psychological accuracy. He therefore thinks that since the existence of causal laws governing our actions does not have this effect, there is no conflict between moral responsibility and causal determination. This argument depends on the assumption that psychological accuracy is the only basis on which moral responsibility might require freedom. This may be so given Hume’s account of blame, according to which it is just a sentiment of disapproval toward an agent’s character. But if blame is understood in some other way, then psychological accuracy may not be the only reason for believing that blame requires freedom.

Galen Strawson, for example, believes that in order for it to be appropriate to blame a person for committing a vicious crime, it is not enough that that action should actually express reprehensible attitudes such as indifference toward the lives of others and a desire to make them suffer. The agent must
also have consciously and explicitly chosen to be the kind of person who would have such attitudes and act from them.\textsuperscript{50} Strawson believes this because of the particular kind of moral assessment that he has in mind: the kind of moral responsibility “such that, if we have it, then it \textit{makes sense}, at least, to suppose that it could be just to punish some of us with (eternal) torment in hell and reward others with (eternal) bliss in heaven.”\textsuperscript{51}

It does seem to make no sense, or at least to be highly objectionable, for God to make people suffer an eternity of torment for their sins if God set things up in such a way that it was inevitable that they would have exactly those sins. The requirement of psychological accuracy would not be violated in such a case. The people who would be punished would really have the moral faults in question. So there must be some other reason why this punishment is so objectionable. What makes it objectionable, I suggest, is the fact that they could not in any way have avoided this terrible punishment.

It is important to understand the structure of the moral idea at work here, which I call the requirement of adequate opportunity to avoid. This requirement applies in cases in which someone has suffered a harm that people have, in general, a claim not to be subjected to. (I will call this claim “the underlying obligation.”) If the person who has suffered such a harm protests that this obligation has been violated, it can be at least a partial response to this objection to say that he or she had ample opportunity to avoid the harm by choosing appropriately. More may be required to respond adequately to this protest, but at least in many cases this appeal to the opportunity to avoid is an important part of any adequate response.
In the case of hell, more surely is required. Setting things up so that some people will suffer an eternity of torment (when things need not be set up this way) requires substantial justification. It is not enough just to say that those who suffer could have avoided it by making reasonable choices. But giving people adequate opportunity to avoid this fate is at least a necessary condition. We need at least to be able to say to people who suffer this fate that they could have avoided it by choosing reasonably. So if the idea that the blameworthy are to be consigned to hell is to be defensible, people have to have adequate opportunity to avoid being blameworthy (at least in the way that entails hell as a punishment).

The requirement of adequate opportunity to avoid is not an idea of desert. The idea is not that it is fitting or appropriate that people who fail to choose wisely should suffer certain harms. It may be better that they not suffer them. The point is merely that if they do suffer these harms, then their complaint against those who allowed it to happen may be undermined if they had adequate opportunity to avoid this outcome by choosing appropriately, and that in at least some cases it is morally objectionable to allow these harms to occur unless those who suffer them had such an opportunity.

My subject here is not heaven and hell but the much milder idea of blame. But even blame is something people have good reason to dislike. It may therefore be seen as something they have some claim not to suffer, and therefore as something to which the requirement of fair opportunity to avoid may seem to apply. This is particularly so if blame is seen as a sanction—a form of unpleasant treatment that requires justification and is justified by its effects on people’s behavior.
This reasoning does not apply when blame is understood in the way I am proposing. To see why, consider first why it does not apply if blame is understood merely as a kind of negative evaluation or, as Hume suggests, a sentiment of disapproval. Even understood in this way, blame is something that people have reason to dislike. We don’t want people to draw, or even to have good reason to draw, negative conclusions about our relations with them. And we have reason to want them not to draw such conclusions even if they are never expressed and never affect their behavior toward us in any way. But we have no claim against others that they not draw such conclusions, so long as they have good grounds for thinking them to be correct. Since we have no such claim, there is no need to appeal to the idea of our having had “adequate opportunity to avoid” being blamed. Psychological (and moral) accuracy provide all the justification that blame requires, when it is understood in this way.

The problem with this account of blame is that it does not do justice to the seriousness of blame for those who engage in it or for those who are its objects. Blame is more than an assignment of moral grades. Moreover, it might be suspected that the thinness of this evaluative interpretation of blame is what accounts for its failure to require “adequate opportunity to avoid,” and that an interpretation that captured the seriousness that blame seems to have would trigger this requirement. The question, then, is how the “seriousness” or “weight” of blame should be understood.

One familiar way to give blame greater significance is to interpret it as a kind of sanction—a form of treatment that, because it is disliked, can be used to influence behavior. But
this suggestion suffers from two related problems. The first is that the idea that blame is a sanction does not in itself give blame greater weight or seriousness. It presupposes that blame is something that people have good reason to want to avoid, rather than providing, or adding to, an understanding of what this reason is. It might be said that something is added insofar as such accounts focus on expressions of blame, which are particularly unpleasant. No one likes being criticized. But if a purely evaluative interpretation fails to capture the significance of blame, it would also seem inadequate as an account of why people want to avoid being the objects of expressions of blame.

The second problem is that blame itself (apart from particular expressions of blame) seems to have a seriousness that goes beyond mere evaluation, and does not consist in its being a sanction or a judgment that a sanction is called for. Even most expressions of blame are not adequately understood as sanctions. Expressions of blame can influence behavior, but they generally have different aims, such as registering the fact that our relationship with a person has been changed by his conduct, initiating a process that may lead to restoration of this relationship, or just standing up for one's own dignity. These aims are in most instances our primary ones. Our aim in expressing moral blame is not, in general, to serve as enforcers of moral requirements.

The account I am offering explains how blame can have a seriousness that goes beyond mere evaluation and yet does not need the kind of justification that would involve a requirement of adequate opportunity to avoid. To blame a person is to have attitudes and intentions that are made appropriate by
the way in which that person's faults impair one's relation with him or her. This can involve different things in different cases, including such things as withholding or modifying trust and reliance, seeing the person as not eligible, or less eligible, to be a friend or a participant in cooperative relations, changing the meaning one assigns to the person's actions and to one's interactions with him or her, or even ceasing to be disposed to be pleased when things go well for the person, and ceasing to hope that they will go well.

These elements of blame deprive a person of things that he or she has reason to want. But they are not things to which anyone has an unconditional claim. We do not owe it to anyone to trust him or be his friend no matter how he treats us, or to value or take seriously conversation with him no matter what reasons guide his decisions about what to say, or to take pleasure in his well-being no matter what his attitude may be toward others. These attitudes are appropriate only toward those whose attitudes make them appropriate. Where they are not appropriate, we need no further justification for withholding them: there is no need to appeal to beneficial consequences of doing so, or to claim that the person had adequate opportunity to avoid this loss.

Things may be somewhat different with respect to some expressions of blame. The discomfort and distress that a particular way of expressing blame would cause can be a reason against it that calls for some countervailing justification. And this justification may sometimes appeal in part to the fact (if it is a fact) that the person could have avoided being blameworthy in this way. It can be cruel to berate someone for faults that he could not help having, particularly if he is unable to see the
force of the moral objections to what he has done. But not all expressions of blame are open to such objections. It is not cruel to explain to a person why one cannot trust him any longer, even if he cannot help being untrustworthy.

My account of blame is a *desert-based* view, in the sense in which I believe that term should be understood. That is to say, I take blame to consist of attitudes toward a person that are justified simply by attitudes of that person that make them appropriate, and I hold that there is no need to appeal to other justifications such as the beneficial consequences of blaming or the fact that the person could have avoided being subject to blame. Like refusals of friendship, blame is justified simply by what a person is like.

In earlier writing, I have taken a narrower and less favorable view of desert. In *What We Owe to Each Other*, I identified “the desert thesis” as “the idea that when a person has done something that is morally wrong it is morally better that he or she should suffer some loss in consequence,” and I said that this view was “morally indefensible.” My present view of blame is not an instance of the desert thesis. The fact that someone has behaved wrongly can make it appropriate to withhold certain attitudes and relationships, and withholding these things may make that person's life worse. But withholding them is justified, in my view, by the fact that they have become inappropriate, not by the fact that withholding them makes the person worse off. Ceasing to hope that things go well for a person can be one element of blame, but as I have emphasized, this does not involve thinking it to be good that things not go well for him. Not even hoping that they go badly need involve this. (Just as hoping that one's friend will win the
But not all actions. It is not trust him any more.
view, in the sense needed. That is to say, a person that doesn't make them appeal to other bases of blaming being subject to would simply by
unless favorably. I identify the person has better that I said.
But I said the fact that appropriate to withholding withholding have been doing them things go as I have said that probably win the lottery need not entail thinking it would be better if one's friend won than if someone else did.)
I still reject the desert thesis. But it no longer seems to me helpful, or fair to the idea of desert, to identify desert with this particular thesis. There are other, much more plausible views that it makes sense to classify as desert-based because of their particular justificatory structure. My view in particular differs from moral retributivism not in its form (in the way it sees blame as justified in relation to underlying moral requirements) but rather in its content. Moral retributivism is implausible because it is implausible to hold that even the most basic moral requirements—such as the requirement not to inflict serious harm and to prevent such harm when one can—are conditional, and not owed to those whose attitudes impair their moral relations with others.

If blame involves only the alteration of attitudes that I have described, then it can be justified by appeal to the idea that this shift of attitudes is appropriate, or called for, by what an agent is like. Justifications that appeal to the idea of what is "appropriate" or "fitting" are open to objection on the ground that they involve appeals to unstructured intuition, and unless supplemented in some way lack serious normative force. The view I am offering gives this idea more structure (thereby mitigating this objection, if not, to be sure, avoiding it altogether) by locating the idea of appropriateness within a conception of particular relationships, which explain the kind of normative force that is in question. It is asking too much to demand that we be ready to enter into relations of trust and cooperation, and various forms of friendly relations, with people who have shown that they have no regard for our interests.
Doing so can even be demeaning. So an appeal to what is appropriate is an adequate explanation for the suspension of these attitudes. But it is much less plausible to appeal simply to what is "appropriate" to justify the infliction of suffering on those who have treated others badly, or even to justify refusing to help them when they are in danger. The idea of appropriateness by itself seems too weak to bear this justificatory weight.

The evident inadequacy of such a justification may be what draws defenders of moral retributivism toward incompatibilism. Because they see moral blameworthiness as entailing loss of one's claim to avoid suffering, they conclude that in order to be blameworthy it is not enough just to be a certain way; one must also have had adequate opportunity to avoid being that way. As Galen Strawson puts it, one must have consciously and freely chosen to be that way. This represents a move beyond what I am now calling a desert-based view to the idea of an adequate opportunity to avoid.

It is worth asking whether there is any other moral idea beyond the two I have mentioned (psychological accuracy and adequate opportunity to avoid) that might be thought to establish a moral link between blameworthiness and freedom. I do not believe that there is, but I will consider three ideas about what might pull one in this direction.

First, rather than being an appeal to the idea of adequate opportunity to avoid, the requirement that a person must have freely and consciously chosen to be the way he or she is might be internal to the relevant notion of desert: having so chosen might be part of what an agent must be like in order for blame to be appropriate. We should distinguish here between two in-
interpretations of the idea of a person's having chosen to have certain characteristics.

The first interpretation employs the idea of choice in a purely psychological sense. A person chooses something in this sense if it comes about as a result of his having consciously opted for it on the basis of his actual preferences and values, perhaps as these seem to him on reflection. It might be said, however, that the fact that someone chose, in this sense, to have certain attitudes does not make those attitudes fully his, in the sense required for them to be the basis of moral assessment, if the attitudes on the basis of which this reflective assessment was made were not themselves chosen by the agent. This leads to the second interpretation, according to which the attitudes that are the basis of blame must, ultimately, be ones that are chosen by the agent in a deeper sense of "choice" that is independent of any factors that are not themselves ones the agent has chosen.59

As Galen Strawson argues, this deeper idea of choice is incoherent. A choice must be made on some basis that precedes that choice, and choice is significant because it reflects that basis, thereby expressing what the agent is like. Even if there could be a choice that lacked such a basis, it would lack significance because it would reflect nothing about the agent. There would be nothing to reflect.60

Strawson concludes from this that moral responsibility is impossible, whether we have free will or not. But the incoherence he identifies should also give us pause about the reasoning that led to the idea that the grounds of moral assessment must be chosen in this deeper sense. Why should we think that
an agent's choice in the purely psychological sense is not a sufficient basis for moral assessment?

The answer may be that it is unfair to judge an agent on the basis of a choice that is itself based on attitudes that he or she has not chosen to have, because this leaves open the possibility that the agent is "trapped" by the psychological traits he or she happens to have. If this is not an appeal to the lack of adequate opportunity to avoid blame (which I am setting aside for the moment), then it seems to be a deeper version of the requirement of psychological accuracy, which might be called a requirement of metaphysical accuracy. This requirement is based on the idea that there is a sense of "what a person is like" that is deeper than, and not settled by, the psychological attitudes that that person happens to have, and that blame and other forms of moral assessment must be based on what a person is like in this deeper sense.

If these assumptions are correct, then Hume was mistaken in thinking that the liberty of spontaneity that moral assessment involves did not also require the liberty of indifference. If we lack the liberty of indifference—if our psychological attitudes and the actions they lead to are governed by causal laws—then (on the assumptions we are considering) we also lack liberty of spontaneity of the kind that moral assessment requires, since there is no assurance that our psychological states will accurately reflect what we are like, at the deeper level with which moral assessment is concerned.

But should we accept these assumptions? I believe that we should not. I do not see how to understand the deeper sense of "what a person is like" that is supposed to be independent of the psychological attitudes that the person happens
to have. Moreover, it is these attitudes that constitute our relations with each other and are therefore the basis of moral blame, as I am suggesting we understand it.

The question of whether a person's attitudes were chosen, or were subject to his or her control, might be seen as important for a further reason, however. The idea might be that an attitude is not attributable to a person—not his or hers in the sense required for it to be the basis of moral assessment—unless having that attitude is under the person's control, in the sense of being responsive to that person's considered judgment. This is an appealing idea, but one that I believe is mistaken.

For an attitude to be attributable to a person in the sense required for it to be an appropriate basis for blame or other forms of moral assessment, it is not necessary even that that attitude be under the person's control in the purely psychological sense of being responsive to his or her judgment. When something seems to me to be a reason, it is up to me to decide whether it is one. This is up to me in the sense of being a judgment that I am answerable for and can be asked to defend, but it is not, in general, up to me in the sense of being a matter of choice on my part. To have a choice whether to do A or B is to be in a position to make it the case that I do one or the other by deciding appropriately. Our decisions about reasons are not in general like this. We can choose whether to do A or B. But we decide (not choose) whether a given consideration is a good reason to do A, just as, in the realm of belief, we decide (not choose) whether a consideration is a reason to believe something.

Attitudes about reasons do not generally arise from con-
scious judgment, let alone from reflection. Most often, things simply strike us as reasons for certain actions, or as irrelevant to them, without our having given any prior thought to the matter. But although they arise unbidden and are not objects of choice, our attitudes toward reasons are, ideally, responsive to our judgment. If I were perfectly rational, then when I decided, on reflection, that a consideration that at first seemed to me to be a reason for a certain action was not in fact a reason, this consideration would cease to seem to me to be a reason. Our attitudes toward reasons are thus ideally, or normatively, under our control.

But what would hold ideally is not always true in practice. A consideration can continue to seem to me to be a reason even though I judge firmly that it is not one. The fact that hiring a certain candidate would please a colleague whom I dislike can continue to seem to me to be a reason to decide against that candidate, even though I firmly judge that it is not. It might be claimed that when an attitude resists a person’s judgment in this way, and thus fails to be under his or her reflective control, it is not an appropriate basis for blame because it is not his or hers in the required sense.64

I do not believe that we generally take this view, however, or that we have good reason to do so. There is at least some reason for rejecting blame for the consequences of actions when these are beyond an agent’s control: the fact that these consequences are beyond the agent’s control may mean that they tell us nothing about his or her attitudes. But this reason clearly does not apply to the person’s attitudes themselves. Even when they run contrary to the agent’s judgment, they remain attitudes that he has.
Consider, for example, a man who firmly rejects racist views but who nonetheless sometimes finds himself thinking, when he sees people of a different race, that their skin color is a reason for regarding them as inferior and for preferring not to associate with them. We may suppose that when such a thought occurs to him he is appalled by it and he rejects these thoughts as mistaken and shameful. But they continue to occur nonetheless. The fact that these reactions are contrary to his considered judgment—that he “disowns them”—makes a significant difference to our assessment of this person. It changes the overall picture of what he is like. But it does not erase the relevance of these attitudes altogether. They are still attributable to him, and their occurrence is still a moral defect. That is why he is right to be disturbed and shamed by them. Perhaps they do not rise to the level of something he should be blamed for. This is a question of degree—of how much perfection, or self-command, we can demand of each other. But this question would not even come up if the fact that these reactions are not responsive to the man’s will or judgment rendered them irrelevant to moral assessment.

This is even clearer when we shift from the case of moral relations between strangers to more intimate relationships. What we hope for in our friends is that affection toward us, and concern for our interest, will occur to them spontaneously and not only when they see, on reflection, that these attitudes are called for. Something is lacking in a friend who is not moved by our welfare unreflectively, even if (perhaps recognizing this fault in himself) he is always moved to help us when he can because he carefully monitors himself and always does reflect about his obligations.
In moral assessment, as in these more personal relations, both reflective and unreflective attitudes matter, and persistent unreflective attitudes matter even if the person consistently rejects them on reflection. The relative significance of these different kinds of attitudes may be different in the two cases. The morality that applies between strangers, we might say, is in an important sense about self-regulation, and we expect it to involve checking one's immediate responses. Certain kinds of negative attitudes toward others are moral faults, but it is an important and expected function of moral awareness to control such feelings. We do not expect purity from everyone, but relations of love and friendship are another matter. It is not just that love involves a kind of concern that others cannot expect. It is also important (not just an ideal) that this kind of concern should be, to a large degree, a matter of immediate and spontaneous feeling.

So the relative significance of spontaneous response and reflective judgment is different in the two cases. Given the importance of spontaneous reactions in the case of friendship, however, it would be odd to say that unreflective reactions matter less in moral assessment because they do not fully belong to the person. Therefore, if these reactions are less significant for moral assessment than reflective judgments are, this is not because they are not attributable to the person in the relevant sense, but rather because they are beyond the kind of concern that we can demand of strangers. Their lesser significance is, as I said above, a substantive question and a matter of degree.

It might be charged that I have not taken seriously
enough the implications of the possibility that my friend is just the puppet of outside forces. Surely, the objector might say, if I were to learn that a particular reaction, such as the way she responds to my arrival, was produced in her by someone stimulating her brain, this reaction would not have the significance that I normally give it. How is it any different if the control takes place at a greater distance and over a longer time?

My response is that it is very different. The fact that a friend reacts a certain way when a certain part of her brain is stimulated tells me nothing interesting about her. It says nothing interesting about her in particular, since anyone would react that way to such a stimulus, and it says nothing interesting about her over time, since I can infer nothing from it about how she feels about me or about how she will react to my arrival (without the stimulus) in the future. “Determination” by genetic and environmental factors is very different. It determines what the person as a whole is like, rather than producing reactions that may deviate from this. The fact that a tendency to have a particular reaction (a tendency to strongly like or dislike a certain kind of situation, for example) can be explained in this way does not undermine the degree to which it is part of what the person is like.

As I have said in discussing the ethics of blame, facts about the way a person came to be the way he is, such as that he has certain attitudes because he was treated terribly as a child, can modify the attitudes it is appropriate to have toward him in ways other than by qualifying the degree to which his morally deficient attitudes are attributable to him. If a person sees no reason to give any weight to the interests of others, the
fact that he is like that because he was terribly abused as a child does not make it inappropriate to refuse to consider him as a candidate for trust, cooperation, or friendly relations. He remains an untrustworthy person, with whom we can reasonably refuse to enter into such relationships. As I have said, however, the fact that he “can’t help” being the way he is may make it inappropriate to berate him for being that way. Moreover, the fact that he is also a victim makes it inappropriate not to have certain other attitudes toward him, such as a degree of sympathy, and a special readiness to help him in some ways. The appropriate attitude toward him is not unalloyed blame, even though blame—the kind of modified relationship I have described—remains appropriate.

Two Kinds of Responsibility

I have argued that blame can be appropriate for characteristics that a person could not avoid having, and that the kind of responsibility that is a precondition for blame does not require the opportunity to avoid. There is, however, another kind of responsibility that can require adequate opportunity to avoid, and it is important to distinguish the two. Considering this distinction will lead to the question of whether one can have adequate opportunity of the required kind if one's attitudes and actions are caused by factors outside oneself, over which one has no control.

In the course of an argument about how our ideas about blame should be modified if we believe that agents lack free will, and speaking as if he were still talking about this same subject, J. J. C. Smart makes the following remark:
When, in nineteenth-century England, the rich man brushed aside all consideration for his unsuccessful rivals in the battle for wealth and position, and looking at them as they starved in the gutter said to himself, “Well, they had the same opportunities as I had. If I took more advantage of them than they did, that is not my fault but theirs,” he was most probably not only callous but (as I shall try to show) metaphysically confused. A man who said “heredity and environment made me what I am and made them what they are” would be less likely to fall a prey to this sort of callousness and indifference.\(^6^6\)

Later, in the same vein, Smart considers a man “who excuses himself for his indifference to his less fortunate neighbor by saying, ‘Hadn’t he the same opportunities as I had? He could have got on if he had acted with my drive, initiative, etc.’” Smart then says, “There is sense in such a remark only in so far as the contempt for laziness and lack of drive to which it gives expression is socially useful in spurring others on to display more drive than they otherwise should.”\(^6^7\)

As Smart interprets the rich man’s remarks, they involve two elements. First, the rich man is expressing a negative moral assessment of the poor, whom he blames, or holds in contempt, for their laziness. Second, he is attempting to justify his indifference to the plight of the poor, and to dismiss their claims against him for assistance or better treatment, by citing the fact that “they had the same opportunities as I had.” Smart is assuming that these two attitudes stand or fall together—that the rich man’s indifference to the plight of the poor is jus-
tified if and only if the poor can be blamed for the choices they have made.

The idea that there is a link of this kind between responsibility and blame is commonly heard in political discourse. Conservatives often say that there are two responses to social ills such as urban crime, teenage pregnancy, and drug abuse. One response is to see these as cases of people behaving badly, in which case the remedy is that they should be made to do better. The other response is to see these ills as the products of social conditions such as poverty and inadequate educational systems, in which case the remedy is to change those conditions. To take the latter approach, conservatives say, is to deny that individuals are responsible for what they do.

One also hears expressed, from the left, an attitude that is the mirror image of this one: a reluctance to criticize the poor for faults such as drug use and lack of self-discipline because it is thought that “blaming the victims” in this way would imply that “society” is under no obligation to help them, since their fate is due to their own moral failings.

Both of these views rest on a false dichotomy. It is one question whether a person can properly be blamed for what he does and quite a different question whether he is “responsible for his fate” in a sense that relieves the rest of us of any obligation to alleviate his condition. These two questions may be more easily confused in Smart’s example because the laziness that he describes the rich man as holding in contempt may be thought a moral failing. But if the response, “You could have what I have if you had chosen as I did” has any force, it continues to have force when addressed to someone who is without moral fault.
Consider, for example, a woman who chose, when she was young, to pursue an ascetic life of devotion to art, and who therefore made no effort to launch the kind of career that could have led to a high-paying job. If later, when she is old and sick, she were to complain of her meager life and perhaps seek assistance, the rich man's response that she could have been much better off if she had so chosen would have at least as much force as in the example Smart appeals to. It might well have more force, because as I am imagining the case she really did have the choice, which the poor people in Smart's example may not have had. Whether this response has enough force to undermine her claims to assistance is a further question. Perhaps it does not. The point is just that the force of "you had the choice" does not depend on the fact that the choices made by the person in question were morally objectionable. A person can be responsible for her fate in a sense that undermines her claim on others for help without being open to moral criticism for what she has chosen.

The same is true in the opposite direction. Even if a certain problem arises from people having behaved badly, it does not follow that society is not obligated to do something about this problem. It may be, for example, that the conditions in which the people grew up, and which led them to behave in bad ways, would not exist in a decent society. So a problem can, at the same time, be both grounds for moral criticism of individuals and something that calls for social action.

Confusion between these claims may be invited by the fact that both may be expressed in judgments using the term 'fault': blame involves the attribution of a moral fault, and a claim of responsibility of the second kind may be expressed by
saying, "It's his fault." But despite this verbal similarity, the two kinds of claims are quite distinct. The latter, unlike the former, is primarily a claim about what others owe to the person.

This distinction is particularly clear if blame is seen as simply a matter of negative moral evaluation. On this interpretation, it is clear that the kind of responsibility required for blame is what I have called "responsibility as attributability." All that is required is that the attitudes that make blame appropriate can in fact be attributed to the person as "his." As I have argued, it is not necessary, in order for this to be so, that the person chose to have those attitudes, or that he could have avoided having them by choosing appropriately. By contrast, the kind of responsibility expressed in the claim, "It's your fault"—what I have called substantive responsibility—appeals to the idea that the person has had "adequate opportunity to avoid" the situation in question.

As I have said, the place of this idea is in response to someone's claim that others have an obligation to provide him or her with some benefit. The response presupposes that the underlying obligation is not an obligation to provide the benefit, but only an obligation to put a person in a good enough position to gain the benefit by choosing appropriately, and the response claims that this obligation has been fulfilled.

The qualification "good enough" is important. Having "had the choice" is not an all or nothing affair. Many factors, such as available information, available alternatives, and the conditions under which the choice must be made, can affect the value of having that choice as a protection against losing the benefit. So the question is not merely whether the person
could have avoided the result by choosing differently, but also whether he or she had a good enough opportunity to do so.

Applying this to the case of Smart’s rich man, we might suppose that he takes the poor man in the gutter to be protesting the fact that he does not have a more comfortable life. The rich man’s response is, “No one is obligated to provide you with a comfortable life, but only with the opportunity to gain one by working hard. You had that opportunity, just as I did, so you can’t complain.” This response can of course be disputed. Even if the poor man’s condition is partly the result of choices he made, one can wonder whether he was placed in sufficiently good conditions for making those choices. But the overall structure of the argument is clear, and familiar.

Blame, as I interpret it, involves more than negative moral evaluation. So my interpretation makes judgments of blameworthiness more similar to judgments of substantive responsibility than they would be according to a purely evaluative interpretation. In my view, both kinds of judgments involve substantive claims about the ways we are justified in interacting, or declining to interact, with the individuals in question. But the forms of interaction that judgments of blameworthiness recommend withholding are not owed unconditionally: as I have argued, their suspension can be fully justified simply by what a person is like. Therefore, unlike judgments of substantive responsibility that might be expressed by saying, “It’s your own fault!” judgments of blameworthiness, as I interpret them, need not be justified by appeal to the idea of adequate opportunity to avoid. Substantive responsibility and the kind of responsibility presupposed by moral blameworthi-
ness thus remain distinct, and responsibility of the latter kind does not require opportunity to avoid.

Freedom and Opportunity to Avoid

Where the requirement of opportunity to avoid does apply, however, it may bring with it a stronger requirement of freedom, and worries about free will may be less easily set aside than in the case of moral blame. The problem is obvious enough. Suppose a person complains about bearing some burden, and we reply, "You had the same opportunity to choose that everyone else had, and you could have avoided this burden if you had chosen to do so." He may reply, "What do you mean 'could have'? The way I reacted when presented with these alternatives was determined by factors over which I had no control."

This complaint might be answered by stressing that all that was being claimed was that the person "had a choice" in the purely psychological sense, in which a person has a choice whether A or B if he is put in circumstances in which whether A is realized or B is realized depends on how he responds, and he is aware that this is so. As I have said, merely "having the choice" in this minimal sense may have little or no moral significance. Much depends on the conditions under which the choice is made: the quality of information that the person has, the absence of competing pressures, the attractiveness of the available alternatives, and so on. These factors are encompassed in the idea of adequate opportunity to avoid, and the response of Smart's rich man is weakened by our supposition that the conditions under which the poor man chose—and
might have chosen differently—did not provide him with adequate opportunity in this sense.

No matter how good the conditions for choice may be, however, there may be some people who will choose badly, with results they have good reason to regret, and we need to be able to answer their complaints. They can say, "What good did it do me that I 'had the choice' under what would, for most people, have been 'favorable conditions'? They were not favorable for me. And it was certain that they would not be, given the way I am—that is, given the way my heredity and environment made me."

The best response, I believe, is to say that "giving someone the choice" (under favorable conditions) is just one of the things that we can do to protect them against unwanted outcomes. It is not foolproof, but neither are other protections. Vaccines, for example, do not work for everyone. But from the fact that a vaccine does not work for someone, and that she therefore gets the disease, it does not follow that, in giving her the vaccine and taking other public-health measures, we have not done as much as we could be required to do to protect her against infection. If we have, then she has no complaint.

Similarly, one thing we can do to reduce the likelihood of bad consequences befalling people is to put people in conditions in which they have the choice, in the purely psychological sense, of avoiding those consequences. If the conditions are good enough (if the information and incentives are such as to be effective for most people), and if we have taken whatever further measures are required to reduce the chances of harm, then if a person chooses badly and suffers the harm, he has no complaint against us. That is to say, the result is his responsi-
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bility rather than ours, whether or not he was free in some deeper sense to choose differently than he did.

On this account, the moral significance of having a choice is merely that of being one factor that reduces the likelihood of harm. I believe that this is as much significance as choice can have, whether or not our choices are causally determined. Some people may believe that choice has greater significance than this. They believe that choice can have a special licensing power to confer legitimacy on its consequences, but that it can have this significance only if the choice is not caused by factors outside the agent. If this is the standard view, then I am content to take a somewhat revisionary view.

However, having offered a positive account, albeit a somewhat revisionary one, of how the fact that someone was given a choice could have moral significance even if choices are caused, I can follow this up with a more aggressive line. This is to ask the incompatibilist to explain more exactly what kind of freedom he believes that morally significant choice must have, and to explain how choices that were free in this sense could have a special licensing power. I do not myself see how these questions can be given satisfactory answers.

An Example: The Cosby Controversy

The points I have made in preceding sections about responsibility, blame, and the ethics of blame can be illustrated by considering a controversy generated by some remarks made by the African American comedian Bill Cosby. Speaking at an event sponsored by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the NAACP Legal Defense
and Education Fund, and Howard University in 2004 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Cosby sharply criticized poor blacks in the United States. He criticized them for the way they dress, for their bad manners, for failing to speak proper English, for failing to apply themselves in school, and, in general, for failing to strive to do the things they would need to do in order to get ahead in American society. He also criticized African American parents for failing to see to it that their children corrected these behaviors, and he criticized young blacks for having children when they were not ready to be good parents. The black poor, he said, “are not holding up their end in this deal.” As one might expect, Cosby’s speech drew praise from many conservatives and outraged criticism from liberals, especially from many African Americans. I will focus here on the criticism, which will serve to illustrate a number of the points made in previous sections.

Cosby is himself very wealthy, and it is natural to interpret his remarks as having more than a little in common with those of the imaginary rich man in Smart’s example. One criticism of Cosby involves the left-wing version of the common error I discussed in connection with that example. This is the error of supposing that if poor blacks were open to criticism for the faults Cosby charged them with, then they were responsible for their fate in a sense that would undermine any obligation on the part of the government, or their fellow citizens, to alleviate their condition. As I argued above, this does not follow. It is possible that many poor blacks are properly criticized for behaving in self-destructive ways and also that the government should, as a matter of justice, do more to improve their condition—in particular, that it should do more to
ensure that people are not placed in conditions that generate this kind of self-destructive behavior.

However, given that many people accept the linkage between blame and responsibility that I have claimed is invalid, Cosby's remarks could have the effect of encouraging complacency of the kind that Smart's rich man expressed, and thus of undermining support for programs to aid the black poor. Whatever his intent may have been, Cosby might thus be open to criticism for not considering the political effects that his words were likely to have. But there are also other grounds on which his remarks might be open to criticism.

What Cosby was expressing seems clearly to be blame in the sense I have been discussing. He was speaking as a member of the black community, before an audience of mainly well-to-do blacks, on an occasion sponsored by organizations devoted to advancing the legal, economic, and social condition of blacks in this country. His remarks thus presupposed a certain relationship between himself, his audience, and those he was criticizing, namely the relationship of fellow members of a historically oppressed group. He can be fairly interpreted as saying that the attitudes and behavior of many members of today's black underclass impair their relationship with other blacks in a way that makes appropriate a corresponding adjustment of attitudes toward them on the part of Cosby and the members of his audience.

It is not clear exactly what adjustments in attitude he was saying are called for, but they might include at least: (1) a decrease in sympathy for the poorer members of the black community, and a decreased tendency to view them mainly as victims of unjust deprivation, and (2) a suspension of the soli-
arity that normally requires members of the black community to defend other members against criticism from outside the group, and to refrain from criticizing other members before an audience of outsiders. These attitudes are quite explicit in Cosby's remarks about "not holding up their part of the deal" and about his willingness to "air dirty laundry" in public. It would be a further step for Cosby to say that because "lower economic people" were failing to "hold up their end of the deal," better-off blacks and organizations like the NAACP should no longer feel obligated to work on their behalf. I do not believe that he was expressing this view, but he may have been suggesting that it was not out of the question.

Why might these expressions of blame be deemed inappropriate? It might be said that he was just expressing intraracial class antagonism—black middle-class disapproval of, and desire not to be associated with, the "lower economic people" whose uncouth dress and speech he was condemning. There may well have been an element of this in Cosby's remarks, but he also mentioned more serious matters, such as irresponsible parenting and the failure to study hard in school. If these more serious criticisms have some validity, why should it be thought inappropriate for him to make them?

One answer might be that Cosby, who was lucky and is now wealthy, was showing insufficient sympathy for the plight of the poor and for the difficulties they face. But how would this undermine blame? The idea might be that someone with a fully sympathetic understanding of the plight of poor blacks would understand that the conditions they have to struggle with should excuse them from blame even if they do not justify their conduct. But this answer seems to run the risk of de-
ning that poor blacks are responsible agents. Another possible answer would be that solidarity requires lucky, well-to-do members of the black community, like Cosby, to be unconditionally supportive of their less-fortunate brethren, and not to take even admittedly criticizable behavior as grounds for withdrawing sympathy and support. This answer would require that the attitude of well-off blacks toward the poor should be something more like the attitudes of brothers and sisters toward one another.

So understood, the idea would be that members of the black community who now have relatively easy lives lack standing to blame those whose lives are hard. But there seems also to be something in the criticism that has more to do with Cosby in particular. It might be this: that he grew rich and famous partly through a television situation comedy that minimized the problem of race in America (and was popular in part because it did). By denying the reality of racism, and encouraging the white community to deny it, he undermined his own relation with the black poor. And having let the black poor down in this way, he is not in a position to maintain that they have, as it were, let him down by their failure of self-discipline.

I have not tried to assess fully the merits of these reactions to Cosby’s remarks, and there are no doubt other interpretations of these criticisms that I have not considered. My purpose here has been only to show how the conception of blame that I have been advancing provides an ethical framework within which many of these criticisms make sense, and can be assessed.
Consequence: Is My View Also Revisionary?

The claims I have made in this chapter fall into two groups. Those in the first group are analytical and normative. Employing the distinction between permissibility and meaning, I have called attention to a particular kind of moral response that has two components. The first is a judgment about the meaning of an action: that it indicates something about the agent in virtue of which certain of the agent's relations with others are impaired. This judgment depends on what the relations in question are and what they require. The second component is a decision by a person to have attitudes toward the agent that reflect this impairment. This may represent a change in the person's attitudes toward the agent or merely a confirmation of attitudes already held. The attitudes a person is justified in deciding to hold will depend not only on what the agent has done and his or her reasons for doing it, but also on the person's prior relations to the agent—relations such as friend, neighbor, coworker, victim, or someone living in a distant time and place who is not directly affected by what the agent did.

The claims in my second group are interpretive claims about our ideas of blameworthiness and blame. I said that what we normally call a judgment of blameworthiness should be understood as a conclusion of the kind just described: a conclusion that the action shows something about the agent that impairs his or her relations with others. To blame someone, I said, is to have the attitudes toward him or her that such judgment holds to be appropriate.

Even if the claims in my first group are correct, those in the second group might be mistaken: my interpretations of
blameworthiness and blame may be revisionary. There are several reasons why one might think that this is so.

First, in my view, a conclusion that someone is blameworthy is a conclusion about that person’s attitudes. The person’s willingness to perform a certain action on a given occasion can provide evidence for this conclusion, but the conclusion is in principle one that could be reached on other grounds. It may seem, therefore, that my view fails to account sufficiently for the fact that blame is always for some action. I have explained above why I do not find this objection compelling.

Second, it might be held that the appropriateness of blame does not vary in the way I suggest, according to the relation between the agent and the person who is doing the blaming. Rather, it might be claimed that to blame someone is to accept a negative evaluative judgment about that person’s character or moral record, a judgment that anyone can make in the same way. If there is a disagreement here, it is a disagreement about the character of our moral experience. I take it to be an advantage of my view that it accounts for what seems to me the evident variability of blame, and its clear dependence on particular relationships. This strength of the view is shown in particular in the account it offers of what I have called the ethics of blame.

Third, my account of blame may strike some as revisionary in holding that people can be blamed for things that are not under their control. While acknowledging that my view may be revisionary in this way, I want to emphasize that I did not shape my account of blame with the aim of avoiding problems about free will. My argument thus does not have the form
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that Nagel criticizes when he writes: “The erosion of moral judgment emerges not as the absurd consequence of an oversimplified theory, but as a natural consequence of the ordinary idea of moral assessment, when it is applied in view of a more complete and precise account of the facts. It would therefore be a mistake to argue from the unacceptability of the conclusions to the need for a different account of the conditions of moral responsibility.”

The question I began with was how “the ordinary idea of moral assessment” should be understood. Having come up with an interpretation that seemed to me to account well for the various distinctive features of blame, I then went on to consider what reasons there might be for thinking that blame was appropriate only for things that were under an agent's control. My argument was not that we should reject the condition of control because it has implausible consequences but that we do not have good reason to accept that condition in the first place, as applied to moral blame.

Many people seem to take it as an obvious truth that blame presupposes some kind of freedom, or control over the factors for which a person is blamed. It seems to me that if this is true it must be in virtue of some feature of what blame is, and that it should be possible to spell out why this feature leads to the requirement of freedom. But this has not commonly been done. I have examined several interpretations of blame, and I have identified, in the ideas of psychological accuracy and adequate opportunity to avoid, what seems to me the most plausible reasons for thinking that blame requires a kind of freedom that we lack if our actions are caused by factors outside of us. Neither idea seems to support such a re-

4. Blame

1. I discuss the difference between wider and narrower notions of morality in Scanlon, What We Owe to Each Other, chap. 4; see 171–178.
3. Ibid.
5. This seems to be Hume’s view of moral assessment. He writes, “Tis evident, that when we praise any actions, we regard only the motives that produced them, and consider the actions as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind and temper.” David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. P. H. Nidditch, book 3, part 2, section 1, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 476.
7. Compare Joanna North, “Wrongdoing and Forgiveness,” Philosophy 62 (1987): 499–508. "Typically an act of wrongdoing brings about a distancing of the wrongdoer from the one he has harmed. This distancing involves a forfeiting of the right to the wronged party's sympathy, affection or trust, and is felt as a breakdown or a distortion in the personal relations between the parties. This distortion may also affect their rela-
tions with other people who are not directly involved" (502–503). North does not mention blame. Her topic is forgiveness, but I take her idea to be the same as the one I am developing, since forgiveness is plausibly understood as the healing or setting aside of blame. As North writes, "Forgiveness is a way of healing the damage done to one's relations with the wrongdoer, or at least a first step towards a full reconciliation" (503). I am indebted to Stuart Robinson for calling North's article to my attention.

8. To forestall the impression that I am advocating a particularly harsh and demanding conception of friendship, I would emphasize that I am not taking a position here about which of these responses is called for in Joe's case. The point of my analogy is to draw attention to the kind of responses that blame involves. Exactly which of these is called for in any particular case is a further question.

9. I am indebted to Jeff King and David Sobel for raising this issue.

10. For this reason, 'expectation,' insofar as it suggests specifically expectations about what someone will do, may not be the best word. Perhaps 'assumption' might be better. But I will continue to speak of 'expectations' since this is the term that has generally been used in this context. See, for example, R. Jay Wallace, Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 20–25. Wallace's view is like mine in its emphasis on relationships, which consist in the parties' holding each other to certain expectations. To hold someone to an expectation, in his view, is "to be susceptible to a certain range of emotions if the expectation is violated, or to believe that it would be appropriate for one to feel those emotions if the expectation is violated" (23). His view differs from mine in the emphasis it places on these reactive emotions.

11. I am grateful to Samuel Scheffler for pressing on me the need to emphasize this distinction.

12. There is also the possibility that I never had any reason to think that he was my friend: that the idea was a mistake, or a fantasy, on my part. If this were so then I would have reason to revise my intentions and expectations, but nothing analogous to blame of Joe would be involved. I am indebted to Kyla Ebels Duggan for calling this possibility to my attention. The corresponding possibility in regard to the moral relationship that is my main concern would be that I was mistaken in thinking that Joe was a rational agent at all, capable of standing in moral relations with others. In this case as well, the change in attitude that would be called for
would not be analogous to blame, because it would not be occasioned by Joe's failure to live up to the standards involved in a relationship he was a party to.

13. Norvin Richards cites what he takes to be the absence of such a relationship as an objection to the view that forgiveness is a matter of "reestablishing a relationship" with the person who has wronged us. See Richards, "Forgiveness," *Ethics* 99 (1988): 79.

14. In a somewhat similar vein, John Skorupski says that a characteristic disposition to which what he calls the "blame-feeling" gives rise is a partial and temporary "withdrawal of recognition," of those toward whom it is felt as members of the moral community. See Skorupski, *Ethical Explorations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 151.

15. Sara Olack defends such a view in "Punishment as Negative Reciprocity," PhD diss., Harvard University, 2006. Some of what Peter Strawson says suggests a similar view. As Strawson sees it, the appropriate reaction to violation of moral demands goes beyond reactive attitudes such as indignation, disapprobation, and resentment. These attitudes, he writes, "tend to inhibit or at least to limit our goodwill towards the object of these attitudes, tend to promote an at least partial and temporary withdrawal of goodwill." He goes on to explain this withdrawal of goodwill as follows: "The partial withdrawal of goodwill which *these* attitudes entail, the modification *they* entail of the general demand that another should, if possible, be spared suffering, is, rather, the consequence of *continuing* to view him as a member of the moral community; only as one who has offended against its demands. So the preparedness to acquiesce in the infliction of suffering on the offender which is an essential part of punishment is all of a piece with this whole range of attitudes of which I have been speaking." Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," 90–91.

16. George Sher also holds that the morally vicious do not forfeit their rights, but that the value of their well-being and happiness is decreased. Sher, *Desert* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 148. I will argue that the latter is not so, although we may have less reason to hope for their happiness and success and be pleased by it.

17. Strawson's claim that resentment involves "partial withdrawal of goodwill" ("Freedom and Resentment," 90–91) may gain plausibility by failing to draw this distinction. A number of the attitudes I have just listed as being withdrawn in cases of blame, such as an intention to help a person with his or her projects and a disposition to hope that things go well for him or her, might be called forms of goodwill. So in this sense I
would agree that blame involves “withdrawal of goodwill,” but not that this withdrawal includes “preparedness to acquiesce in the infliction of suffering” (ibid.). Strawson’s use of the term ‘goodwill’ bundles together a very plausible claim and a highly controversial one.

18. This means that blame, in contrast to a judgment of blameworthiness, is a second-personal attitude in the sense described by Stephen Darwall. See Darwall, The Second-Person Standpoint (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), chap. 4.

19. Strawson also notes that different reactive attitudes are appropriate for those who stand in different relations to an action. He distinguishes between personal reactive attitudes, such as resentment, which are “essentially those of affected parties or beneficiaries,” and “vicarious or impersonal, or disinterested, or generalized analogs” of these. He includes moral indignation in the latter category, and says that although one can feel indignation on one’s own account it is the capability of being held impersonally or vicariously that makes it appropriate to call such attitudes ‘moral.’ “Freedom and Resentment,” 83–84. The range of standpoint-dependent varieties of blame that I would distinguish goes beyond the two (personal and vicarious, or generalized) that Strawson mentions in his article (although he might have recognized more in a longer treatment of the subject). Moral blame is not, in my view, mainly vicarious, or generalized. What marks out some forms of blame as moral is the relationship that they are reactions to the impairment of, rather than the standpoint of those who can properly have those reactions. I am indebted to Martin O’Neill for calling my attention to these aspects of Strawson’s view.

20. Recall here Hume’s observation that “‘tis therefore from the influence of characters and qualities upon those who have an intercourse with any person, that we blame or praise him.” A Treatise of Human Nature, book 3, part 3, section 1, 582. See also Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments, 141–142, 149. Hume makes this observation in the course of describing a process of correction through which we achieve consistency in our moral judgments of those near to us and those farther removed in time and space, and thus also consistency in the judgments of different observers. On my account, judgments of blameworthiness have this kind of consistency, but blame is, inevitably, more variable.

21. On Hume’s account, moral appraisal is always this kind of impartial (approval or) disapproval. This is why he can see it as having the consistency mentioned in the previous note.

22. Nagel, “Moral Luck,” 28. Nagel’s claim may be not just that we
have no reason to blame D more than C (because D is no worse than C) but also that it is unfair to blame D more on the basis of factors that were beyond his control. I discuss this idea later in the chapter, in the section “Blame and Freedom.”

23. An evaluative interpretation of blame might be extended to account for moral outcome luck in a similar way. One could distinguish between blame, which is a negative assessment of an agent’s character, and the significance that people have reason to attach to this assessment, which can be affected by consequences of an agent’s action that are beyond the agent’s control. As Adam Smith says, “Our indignation against the folly and inhumanity of his conduct is exasperated by our sympathy with the unfortunate sufferer.” Theory of Moral Sentiments, 191. The question to ask about such an augmented evaluative account of blame is how this increased significance is to be understood. If the answer is that it is significant for people’s relation with the agent, then this account comes close to the one I am offering. It is noteworthy that Smith seems to use ‘praise’ and ‘blame’ to denote pure evaluations of an agent’s character, which remains constant in moral luck cases (see p. 175). It is our reactions of resentment and gratitude that can, he believes, be “exasperated” by an action’s effects. These reactions are not purely evaluative, since they involve a readiness to inflict suffering or convey benefit (138).

24. Susan Wolf identifies this tendency, to think that D should be more concerned with what he has done than C, with our approval of the “nameless virtue” of being willing to “be held accountable for what one does, understanding the scope of ‘what one does’ particularly when costs are involved, in an expansive rather than a narrow way.” Wolf, “The Moral of Moral Luck,” Philosophic Exchange 31 (2001): 13. She also writes that an agent’s failure to have this virtue amounts to a failure to “take the consequences of his faultiness to have consequences for him, to be a significant part of his personal history” (12). This is close to what I am saying about moral luck, except that I would write “for his relations with others” instead of “for him.” If one understands blame (and hence guilt) in an essentially evaluative way, as Wolf seems to do, then her nameless virtue goes beyond a susceptibility to guilt and is independent of it. In my view the two are more closely linked, since both involve a concern with the significance of one’s actions for one’s relations with others.

25. The “apologies” one often hears from public figures do not fulfill these functions. They thus fail to be real apologies but are instead mere expressions of regret at an outcome (as in “I am sorry if anyone was
of blame might be extended to a "similar way. One could distinguish the assessment of an agent's character, the reason to attach to this assessment, the nature of an agent's action that are both understood: "Our indignation against conduct is exasperated by our sympathies."

The extentive evaluative account of blame is the standard view. If the answer is that with the agent, then this account is noteworthy: that Smith seems to mean evaluations of an agent's character in particular (see p. 175). It is our view, he believes, be "exasperated... does not purely evaluative, rendering or convey benefit (1.38).

The tendency, to think that D should be worse than C, with our approval of one held accountable for what one does, particularly when not a narrow way." Wolf, 2001: 13. She also writes amounts to a failure to recognize consequences for him, to (12). This is close to what I would write "for his relations if one understands blame as Wolf seems to do, guilt and is indebted, since both into one's relations in the eyes but are instead necessary if anyone was offended by my remarks."

People who issue such "apologies" fail to take responsibility for their actions in the relevant sense. Taking responsibility involves not only admitting one's causal role, and one's faultiness, but also acknowledging the significance that this fault has had for others, and the need to take steps to restore one's relations with them.

26. Something similar is true of Strawson's account: reactive attitudes such as resentment and gratitude are not evaluations. So if the standard view of blame is evaluative, then what Strawson offers is a departure from the standard view.


28. Here is William James on a form (admittedly a strong form) of the kind of thing that blame involves, in this case being snubbed or "cut dead": "No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in a society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof. If no one turned when we entered, answered when we spoke, or minded what we did, but if every person we met 'cut us dead'; and acted as if we were non-existing things, a kind of rage and impotent despair would ere long well up in us, from which the cruelest bodily torture would be a relief; for these would make us feel that, however bad might be our plight, we had not sunk to such a depth as to be unworthy of attention at all." William James, The Principles of Psychology, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1890), 293–294. Quoted in John Skorupski, Ethical Explorations (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 152.


32. This seems to be a limiting case of blame. But even to write someone off in the sense I have in mind is not to see him as outside the range of moral subjects. He remains a person to whom various duties are owed. Compare Christine Korsgaard, Creating the Kingdom of Ends (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 200.

34. See Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 211.

35. Hieronymi, "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness." Hieronymi's condition 3 does not follow from condition 1, since it might be that what the person did was wrong but not a violation of a duty owed to you.

36. This may capture what is plausible in the claim that punishment is owed to the criminal. But two points should be noted. First, in my view, if anything is owed it is not punishment but blame. Punishment seems to be owed only insofar as one supposes that blame must involve punishment. Second, as noted in the text, it is not clear that anything is owed—that is, that there is any obligation here. Would the criminal have a claim against us if we failed to blame him because it was too costly, or because we were too occupied with other problems to be concerned with him? It does not seem to me that he would. What is objectionable—that is to say, blameworthy—is failing to blame him because we do not regard him as capable of meaningful action.

37. It is a further question whether failing to blame in these cases can be not only blameworthy but also impermissible. On the view I am offering, to blame someone involves withholding certain attitudes toward him, such as the intention to trust him in certain ways. This is something we can choose to do or not. So it is the kind of thing to which the question of permissibility applies. It is therefore a substantive moral question whether blame is sometimes impermissible. In contrast, judgments of blameworthiness may reflect decisions but are not matters of choice. Therefore they are not attitudes to which the question of permissibility applies, although they can be the subject of moral criticism of other kinds.

38. I am indebted to Samuel Freeman for raising this point.

39. This explains Gary Watson’s observation that "if one shares a moral fault with another, one may feel it inappropriate to blame the other. Here the point is not that the other is not responsible or blameworthy, but that it is not one's business to blame. One should tend to one's own faults first." Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil," 145.

40. Recall here Hieronymi's point about the preconditions for forgiveness.

41. Note that it does not similarly undermine the appropriateness of my concluding, or even saying, that your actions are blameworthy, so long as I am consistent in admitting that the same is true of my own.
The phenomenon in question concerns blaming rather than blameworthiness.


43. Cohen says “condemn,” but I do not believe this difference in terms is significant.

44. I will say more about this in the following section, “Blame and Freedom.”


46. As George Sher also observes. See Sher, In Praise of Blame, 60.

47. The requirement of psychological accuracy can be seen as providing a rationale for the claim that moral responsibility requires what John Martin Fischer calls “guidance control.” See, for example, Fischer, My Way (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 14–28 and chap. 5. Guidance control has in turn two elements, which Fischer calls reasons-responsiveness and ownership of the mechanism (18). On the latter, see John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 230–239. Fischer holds that moral responsibility does not require what he calls strong reasons-responsiveness (that, had there been sufficient reason for some alternative course of action, and the agent was guided by the same mechanism, then he would have followed the alternative course). See My Way, 60–69. In holding this, he is in agreement with what I am calling the requirement of psychological accuracy. It is less clear whether that requirement would even demand what he calls “weak reasons-responsiveness.”

48. Notable among those who have pointed this out is Hume. See A Treatise of Human Nature, book 2, part 3, sections 1, 2.

49. Ibid.


51. Ibid., 9.

52. There is a way of understanding heaven and hell that makes sense on the view of blame that I am proposing. On this interpretation, the justification of heaven and hell is compatible with causal determination of our actions, although it may be incompatible with divine predestination.
Suppose that one's relationship with God is the most important thing in life, and that if one has lived in the right way, then after death one will live on in fellowship with God. This is what heaven involves. But if one's actions and attitudes are such that one's relationship with God is impaired, then it is not appropriate for God to take one into His presence. God is a forgiving God. He offers us grace if we will admit our sins, repent, and accept His love. But if we have refused to do this, then it is not appropriate for Him to take us into His fellowship. For Him to do so would be like a person pretending that someone is his friend, and treating him like one, when in fact he has behaved in a way that is incompatible with friendship and has declined to renounce these faults and be forgiven. Such a person is forever excluded from God's presence. This is what hell means, according to the view I am proposing. So described, hell may be a far cry from fire and brimstone. (It seems more cold than hot.) But it sounds worse if we suppose that there is evil in the world, and that to be excluded from a relationship with God is to be left to be tormented by temptation and evil.

Even augmented in this way, this conception of heaven and hell is nonpunitive. Its point is not to affect behavior, or to reward the good and punish the bad, any more than the point of friendship is to reward good friends and punish bad ones. Understood in this way, for heaven and hell to make sense and be morally justifiable, we do not need to appeal to the idea that individuals have a fair opportunity to avoid hell. God does not owe it to us, unconditionally, to accept us into fellowship with Him, or to protect us from the pain of exclusion from His fellowship. What I call a pure desert justification is sufficient.

If, however, our sinful nature and our rejection of divine grace are predestined—due to God's own decision in creating us in a certain way—this may deprive God of standing to blame us for these faults, for reasons discussed by Cohen in "Casting the First Stone"—even though we are blameworthy. This would undermine the justification for hell as I am interpreting it, and perhaps according to a more traditional interpretation as well. Cohen refers to this as the "you made me do it" defense. (He does not use this particular example.)

Bearing in mind this interpretation of hell, the objection that my view of blame is "too weak," because the "moral relationship" that I claim we stand in to everyone is too abstract to matter much to people, suggests one possible reason for thinking that, as is often claimed, there can be no morality without a God. The idea would not be that morality requires the sanction of divine punishment and reward, but rather that
the idea of a relationship with God that is impaired by one's sins is meaningful to people in a way that a relationship with myriad strangers is not. As Lucy Scanlon has pointed out, an analogous view of political solidarity would be that the idea of one's obligation to one's fellow citizens, as free and equal participants in a just political order, is too abstract to motivate individuals to make the sacrifices needed, for example, in wartime. What is needed, it may be said, is an idea of loyalty founded on a relationship that each citizen is taken to have with the king or queen, whom they serve and who in return cares about all of his or her subjects.

My response, as I have argued above, is that the impairment of their relations with others, even strangers, is something that people do care about and are motivated by. This is shown by, among other things, the lengths to which people are often willing to go to avoid admitting that they (individually or collectively) have wronged others. The alternative that I offer to the theistic account of heaven and hell might thus be summed up by reinterpreting a line from Sartre's play No Exit: "Hell is other people." That is to say, hell is the relationship with other people that one creates by treating them badly.

53. This is a central element in the revisionary account of blame offered by J. J. C. Smart in "Free Will, Praise, and Blame," Mind 70 (1961): 291–306. But it also plays a role in more standard thinking about the topic, including common ideas of heaven and hell. In fairness to Smart, it should be noted that the second problem I go on to discuss would not trouble him, since he does not offer his account as an interpretation of our ordinary idea of blame, but rather as a substitute for it. In his view, our ordinary notion of blame is untenable because, he believes, it is committed to a "metaphysics of free will." I am offering an account of blame that seems to me to come much closer to capturing our ordinary notion, while avoiding any such commitment. Whether it, too, is revisionary is a question I will return to at the end of this chapter.

54. Gary Watson argues that blame is appropriate only for agents who are capable of understanding the basic demand of morality, that one have a reasonable regard for others. He writes, "Since the reactive attitudes involve this demand, they are not (as fully) appropriately directed to those who do not fully grasp the terms of the demand." And, "The reactive attitudes are incipient forms of communication, which make sense only on the assumption that the other can comprehend the message." Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil," 127. In my view, however, blame itself—the revision of one's attitudes toward a person in response to attitudes expressed in his behavior—is not, even incipiently,
a form of communication. Expressions of blame are forms of communication, and they may be pointless if the person cannot appreciate their force. But this does not, in my view, make blame itself inappropriate.

55. This broad understanding of desert-based views is in accord with Joel Feinberg's analysis of the concept of desert in "Justice and Personal Desert," in Feinberg, Doing and Deserving (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 55–87. He writes that "the kind of propriety characteristic of personal desert is not only to be contrasted . . . with qualification under a rule or regulation; it is also to be likened to, or even identified with, a kind of 'fittingness' between one person's actions or qualities and another person's responsive attitudes" (82).

56. Scanlon, What We Owe to Each Other, 274.

57. Similarly, Feinberg says that his view of desert "suggests in turn that responsive attitudes are the basic things persons deserve and that 'modes of treatment' are deserved only in a derivative way, insofar perhaps as they are the natural or conventional means of expressing the morally fitting attitudes." Feinberg, Doing and Deserving, 82.

58. George Sher also notes the normative weakness of an unspecified notion of what is fitting. See Sher, Desert, 114. In the case of moral desert, he proposes to remedy this lack by appealing to the idea that the distinctive value of persons derives from their being seekers of value, who thereby confer value on the objects of their pursuit. Because the virtuous seek value to a greater degree than others, they are themselves more valuable and confer greater value on what they seek. It is therefore appropriate that happiness be apportioned to virtue because the happiness of the virtuous is more valuable than that of others, and that of the vicious, correspondingly, of lesser value. Ibid., 144–149. Compare Robert Nozick, Philosophical Explanations (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 612. My view differs from Sher’s and Nozick’s in grounding the normative force of "appropriateness" in reasons internal to certain relationships, rather than in an idea of value that, like Kant’s idea of moral worth, is open to interpretation in a more impersonal way as something that it is good to have in the world. Darwall draws a similar contrast in The Second-Person Standpoint, 68.

59. Thus Bernard Williams criticizes what he calls "morality" or "the blame system" on the ground that "there is a pressure within it to require a voluntariness that will be total and will cut through character and psychological determination, and allocate blame and responsibility on the ultimately fair basis of the agent's own contribution, no more and no less. It is an illusion to suppose that this demand can be met (as op-
posed to the less ambitious requirements of voluntariness that take character largely as given.” Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985). 194. I agree with Williams that this is an illusion, and I am offering an interpretation of morality, and blame, that requires only this “less ambitious” form of voluntariness.

60. As Nagel writes, if we apply consistently the idea that people can be blamed only for things that are under their control, then “the area of genuine agency, and therefore of legitimate moral judgment, seems to shrink under this scrutiny to an extensionless point.” Nagel, “Moral Luck,” 35. The conclusion he intends to draw from this, however, is different from the one I am arguing for. The problem here is what Robert Kane calls the “intelligibility question”—that is, the intelligibility of the idea that we are ultimately responsible for our actions. See Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), esp. 13–16, 81–88. For Kane’s response to this question, see chaps. 7–9. I am arguing that ultimate responsibility of this kind is not required for moral responsibility, but I should note that Kane is at least as much concerned with the threat that determinism poses to an agent’s view of himself or herself. Nomy Arpaly also emphasizes this threat in *Merit, Meaning and Human Bondage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). This problem, which I have called the personal problem of free will, may be more intractable than that of explaining why ultimate responsibility is not a precondition for moral blame. See Scanlon, “The Significance of Choice,” in *The Tanner Lectures in Human Values*, vol. 7, ed. Sterling M. McMurrin (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 149–216. But incompatibilist responses to the two problems are equally threatened by the question of intelligibility.

61. Saul Smilansky states this point forcefully: “Together with the moral obligation to respect and to track (in our own reactions and practices) identity, choice, and responsibility, we must also not forget the ultimate arbitrariness of it all. People can often be adequately characterized as victims of the internal and external circumstances that made them what they are—circumstances ultimately beyond their control, which they lacked real ability and opportunity to alter. Such circumstances, which lie behind their choices and their ensuing fate, are in a deep sense not their fault.” “Free Will and Respect for Persons,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 29 (2005): 256. In my view, the idea that someone is a “victim” can be understood in three ways. First, the fact that a person’s formative circumstances were very bad can change our relationship with him, as I
indicate in discussing the case of the killer Robert Harris. Second, the belief that even if our external circumstances have been entirely favorable we are nonetheless trapped by them because they affect us in ways over which we have no control may invoke the idea of psychological (or metaphysical) accuracy—that we cannot be blamed for our psychological traits because they are forced on us by our circumstances and therefore do not reflect the way "we" really are. As I argue in the text, this seems to me to depend on an incoherent idea of what "we" are really like. Third, the belief that we are trapped by our circumstances may be an appeal to the idea that we do not have adequate opportunity to avoid being the way we are. In my view, this does not apply in the case of moral blame, where opportunity to avoid is not required. Where it does apply, this worry is more serious, as I argue in the next section. Even when our practices of holding people responsible for their choices can be justified, however, the sense of arbitrariness that Smilansky describes remains relevant, as I say in What We Owe to Each Other, 294.

62. This seems at base to be a version of what I called above the requirement of psychological accuracy. But since it has a distinctive rationale, it merits separate discussion.

63. George Sher also argues against the idea that "no one deserves blame for anything that is beyond his control." See Sher, In Praise of Blame, 55–70.

64. Nagel suggests this in "Moral Luck," 32–33.


67. Ibid., 305.

68. See Scanlon, What We Owe to Each Other, 248–249, 277–294.


70. And more similar than I suggested in What We Owe to Each Other, 248–249, 290–294.

71. The idea that moral responsibility requires adequate opportunity to avoid may be what tempts some to think that it calls for what Fischer terms "regulative control" rather than merely "guidance control,"
which is supported by the requirement of psychological accuracy. See Fischer, *My Way*, 14–28, chap. 5.


73. Nagel considers three forms of moral luck: (1) luck in the outcome of one's action, (2) luck in the character that one has, and (3) luck in the circumstances in which one is placed. He sees all three as cases in which the judgments of blameworthiness that we are inclined to make conflict with the condition of control: "that people cannot be morally assessed for what is not their fault, or for what is due to factors beyond their control." Ibid., 25. I see these three cases as different. With respect to the first, taking into account the significance of blame as well as the quality of an agent's character, one could explain how the outcomes of agents' actions could make a difference in the attitudes it was reasonable to have toward them. With respect to the second, the condition of control lacks justification. Nagel cites examples of the third case: "Someone who was an officer in a concentration camp might have led a quiet and harmless life if the Nazis had never come to power in Germany. And someone who led a quiet and harmless life in Argentina might have become an officer in a concentration camp if he had not left Germany for business reasons in 1930" (26).

The question that these cases raise for my view is, when do hypothetical truths about what a person would do under one set of circumstances make a difference to his relationships with people under some other set of circumstances? It seems possible that if these tendencies are entirely submerged, and make no difference in what a person does or thinks or feels, then they make no difference, and blame is appropriate only under the circumstances in which these tendencies are in some way active. However, it could well be that the opportunism, cruelty, or excessive deference to authority that would have led a person to behave terribly under the Nazi regime, for example, was also very much a part of his personality in ordinary times. In that case, this fault would impair his relations with others in both sets of circumstances, although its significance would vary in the way I described in discussing blame for the outcome of one's actions. There is also, of course, the epistemological fact that it is very difficult to know what a person would do under circumstances in which he has never been placed.