

**Aness Webster (University of Nottingham) & Stephen Bero (University of Surrey): Asking Too Much of Shame**

Bernard Williams' *Shame and Necessity* (1993) was an influential early contribution to what has become a broader effort to rehabilitate shame as a moral emotion.<sup>1</sup> But there is a tension in Williams's discussion that presents an underappreciated difficulty, both for Williams's own views about shame and for the more general project of rehabilitating shame—or so we contend. The tension arises between what Williams takes shame in its essence to *be* and what he expects shame to *do*—the prominent and wide-ranging role that he imagines for shame in his conception of ethical life. This raises questions about whether shame can satisfy the sorts of ambitions that Williams and many of his fellow rehabilitators have set for it. Ultimately, we suggest that it has been a mistake to suppose that shame's rehabilitation should depend on its suitability to play a special, central role in ethical life; put another way, it has been a mistake to suppose that shame was ever in need of rehabilitation.

On the way to developing an understanding of what shame is, Williams criticizes what he sees as a deeply entrenched tendency, reaching back to Plato, of seeking to understand “the functions of the mind, especially with regard to action, [as] defined at the most basic level in terms of categories that get their significance from ethics” (160). The result, Williams argues, of organizing our understanding of mental life around a set of narrowly ethical concerns and categories is an incomplete and distorted picture of the relevant phenomena.

Williams aims to avoid this moralistic error by attending to both moral and non-moral shame experiences. “The root of shame,” he says, “lies in exposure in a more general sense, in being at a disadvantage: in what I shall call, in a very general phrase, a loss of power” (220). This characterization—whatever its other faults or merits—can claim to be appropriately broad in scope; for as Williams says, “we, like the Greeks, can be as mortified or disgraced by a failure in prowess or cunning as by a failure of generosity or loyalty” (92).

This neutral approach has been a valuable legacy of Williams's engagement with shame; but for him it is one piece of a larger project. One of Williams's guiding ambitions is to develop a conception of ethical life that offers an alternative to what he sees as the prevailing—and ultimately incoherent—modern conception. So although he does not question the intelligibility of non-moral shame, it is essential for his larger project that shame perform a variety of important functions in forming and sustaining ethical agency and ethical community.

Thus, for Williams shame, together with indignation or a sense of honor, are “shared sentiments with similar objects” serving to “bind people together in a

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<sup>1</sup> Other contributions to this effort include: Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment* (1985); Sarah Buss, “Respect for Persons,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29(4), 517-550 (1999); J. David Velleman, “The Genesis of Shame,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 30(1), 27-52 (2001); Cheshire Calhoun, “An Apology for Moral Shame,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 12(2), 127-146 (2004); Michelle Mason, “On Shamelessness,” *Philosophical Papers* 39(3), 401-425 (2010); Julien A. Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno & Fabrice Teroni, *In Defense of Shame: The Faces of an Emotion* (2012); and Krista K. Thomason, *Naked: The Dark Side of Shame and Moral Life* (2018).

community of feeling" (80); and the internalized other before whom we often feel shame serves to "provide the focus of real social expectations, . . . of how my actions and reactions will alter my relations to the world about me" (83-84).

At the same time, Williams says that the "structures of shame... give a conception of one's ethical identity" (93), that shame "embodies conceptions of what one is and of how one is related to others" (94), and that it "mediates between act, character, and consequence, and also between ethical demands and the rest of life" (102). Shame is thus meant to serve as a prod to ethical conduct, as well as the voice of a certain class of ethical "necessities" that "are internal, grounded in the *ethos*, the projects, the individual nature of the agent, and in the way he conceives the relation of his life to other people's" (103).

Altogether, this represents an ambitious ethical agenda for shame. The question is whether shame as Williams conceives it is up to the task—or whether he is asking too much of shame. We argue there are two difficulties that Williams does not adequately contend with. First, if we take seriously the idea that shame consists in a felt "loss of power" in some very general sense, it becomes doubtful that shame possesses the necessary structure, stability, sensitivity, and subtlety to function in the ways Williams proposes. Second, given the breadth of Williams's conception of shame, it is necessary to consider the full range of shame experiences, including those that lack any ethical dimension, and how these experiences can interact with—and indeed disrupt or swamp—shame's ethical operations. Shame's "bonding, interactive effects" (83), for instance, need to be considered alongside the ways in which shame is often used as a tool of power, to form relations that are asymmetrical (rather than reciprocal) and divisive and alienating (rather than community-sustaining).

The tension between what Williams takes shame to be, and what he expects it to do, is illustrative of a general problem for efforts to rehabilitate shame as a moral emotion. Conceived in a plausibly general way, shame seems unsuited to play any more ambitious or distinctive role in moral life than other relatively basic emotions, like happiness or fear; conversely, richer conceptions of shame that might enable it to play such a role are insufficiently general to be plausible as accounts of shame. We discuss some recent treatments of shame that exemplify this more general challenge, and end by calling into question the very idea of rehabilitating shame.

**Lorenzo Greco (University of Oxford): The View from Here: Williams on the First-Personal Point of View and Individuality**

In my paper I go back to the well-known essay by Williams, “The Self and the Future”. This essay (together with others included in *Problems of the Self*) is generally considered to uphold the thesis whereby Williams is an advocate of the bodily criterion regarding the continuity of personal identity over time. It is my belief that this metaphysical issue is not in fact his primary concern in “The Self and the Future”, which is revealed instead to be an eminently practical one, that is, that of defending and promoting the value of the individuality of human beings. To demonstrate my point, I shall focus on the methodological criterion Williams adopts in presenting his thought experiment involving the transfer of memories between two people, and highlight the importance of the first-personal point of view for the success of Williams’ case. I maintain that by focusing on the first-personal point of view in Williams’ discussion it becomes possible to call attention to one of the central themes of his philosophy; far from being just another essay on the nature of personal identity, “The Self and the Future” represents part of a larger attempt by Williams to vindicate the significance of individuality as seen from the specific, first-personal viewpoint of the single person who considers his or her life from the here and now. Furthermore, as Williams’ argument unfolds, the individual lives of people reveal themselves to be embedded in contingency, and deeply dependent on luck, thus connecting to other main strands in Williams’ thought. I shall therefore proceed by first analysing “The Self and the Future”, so as to show how the importance of the first-personal point of view emerges. By referring also to other works by Williams – in particular “Persons, Character and Morality”, and “The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality” – I shall then describe the kind of individuality Williams has in mind, and the consequent image of the person that emerges from it. In doing that, I shall focus on Williams’ reflections on the importance of the body in relation to its capacity for feeling pain, on the perspective from the present, and on categorical desires. This also allows me to further stress the specificity of Williams’ position with respect to other philosophers, such as Thomas Nagel and Derek Parfit, with whom Williams debated issues concerning personal identity and the self.

## **Robert J. Hartman (Stockholm University): Moral Luck and Compassion**

Luck permeates our moral lives. The reckless driver is unlucky that there was a pedestrian on the road when she took a curb too fast; the bribe taker would have had better luck if she had never been offered the bribe; the racist is unlucky to have grown up in a subculture that disvalues people with different skin color. It is part of conventional wisdom that appreciating the role of luck in our moral lives provides a reason to be compassionate, humble, and generous with others, and this includes being stingier with blame; this wisdom is at least partially captured in the following adage: “There [being a prisoner walking to the gallows], but for the grace of God, go I.” (Call this conventional wisdom the compassionate insight.)

Some positions in the moral luck debate can easily make sense of the compassionate insight. For example, Neil Levy (2011) and Galen Strawson’s (1994) view that luck universally undermines moral responsibility provides a good reason to not to blame the killer driver, bribe taker, and racist—namely, they are not blameworthy.

It is not obvious, however, how other positions in the moral luck debate accommodate the compassionate insight. Consider the Bernard Williams-friendly view that I have defended in recent work (the Moral Luck View or MLV) that particular kinds of resultant, circumstantial, and constitutive luck can positively affect an agent’s praiseworthiness and blameworthiness (Hartman 2017; forthcoming-a; forthcoming-b). On the MLV, for example, the bribe taker’s blameworthiness for bribe-taking is partially explained by luck in being offered a bribe. Thus, the Levy/Strawson route to accommodating the compassionate insight does not appear to be available to the proponent of the MLV.

The aim of this paper is to consider how the proponent of the MLV can best accommodate the compassionate insight.

First, I consider a proposal based on the work of Saul Smilansky (2000), who argues that moral responsibility is fundamentally dualistic. On the one hand, there is the impossibilist perspective that no one is ultimately morally responsible for anything, because we are not self-made selves. As a result, it is impermissible to blame the bribe taker, and this accommodates the compassionate insight. On the other hand, there is the compatibilist perspective that implies that people often act with a kind of local control captured by reasons-responsiveness that suffices for moral responsibility. According to this perspective, the bribe taker is blameworthy for taking a bribe, because she manifests reasons-responsiveness in taking the bribe, which is consistent with the MLV. The fundamental dualism, then, is that we can truly view agents as not ultimately morally responsible for their actions (accommodating the compassionate insight) and as locally morally responsible for their actions (accommodating the MLV).

Although I regard this proposal as a genuine option for proponents of the MLV, I do not myself accept it, because the impossibilist requirement of absolute self-creation is an implausible requirement for moral responsibility (Hartman forthcoming-a).

Second, I consider a proposal based on the ethics of blame. The ethics of blame is about the conditions that must be satisfied to be blamer-worthy—that is, to have the

appropriate standing to blame the person who deserves blame. Here is a subjunctive non-hypocrisy condition: *X* has standing to blame *Y* only if *X* would not have done the same thing as *Y* if *X* had a similar formative history as *Y* (cf. Coates and Tognazzini 2014). The idea, then, is that it is morally impermissible to blame the bribe taker, because we would have done the same thing if we had her formative history. This proposal makes sense of the MLV, because the bribe taker is still blameworthy. Yet, it accommodates the compassionate insight in a way such that it is impermissible to blame the bribe taker.

In response, I argue that we have little reason to think that such subjunctive conditionals are true given libertarianism (Hartman 2017, pp. 70-80), and to think that everyone would do the same thing in similar formative circumstance given compatibilism (Watson 1987). Finally, I argue that the permissive subjunctive account of the non-hypocrisy is itself implausible.

Third, the proposal that I endorse is that moral fragility and a familiar moral principle provide a *pro tanto* reason to refrain from blaming the unlucky. The basic idea is that we could easily have had worse luck, and if we had worse luck and been blameworthy for worse things, then we would want others to be merciful and generous to us.<sup>1</sup> So, we have reason to do likewise, because it is *prima facie* true that we should act in ways that we would ourselves want to be treated. Thus, the proponent of the MLV has a *pro tanto* reason to be stingy with blame even when she retains the standing to blame the blameworthy person.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Russell's (2017) view is similar in certain respects. One important part of this section would be to clarify my own view in reference to Russell's position.

## **Agata Łukomska (Warsaw University): Bernard Williams on Acting with Moral Confidence**

Confidence as an alternative to ethical knowledge is widely considered to be a rare miss among many hits in Bernard Williams' *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (ELP, 1985). The idea was severely criticised at the time of the book's first publication and in fact, it rarely returns in Williams' later writings. Many commentators see his recourse to this notion as a sign of scepticism, and in one sense they are certainly right; if we choose to understand confidence as the psychological correlate of conviction, Williams' critique of moral cognitivism, in ELP and elsewhere, leaves almost no grounds for being reasonably confident in one's moral outlook. Even if the author of *Moral Luck* admits, in principle, the possibility of ethical knowledge, he argues that it could only be enjoyed by members of a hypothetical "hypertraditional", isolated society, one deprived of occasions and of means to question its own way of life. Arguably none of the existing societies matches this description, which makes Williams deeply sceptical about the possibility of actually having ethical knowledge, or in any case, of maintaining it. If questioning the *status quo* is, as it happens, a necessary part of all available ways of living, all remnants of strong moral convictions are in danger – simply because, as Williams (in)famously contends, in ethics "reflection can destroy knowledge".

Yet he does propose that, even in the face of inevitable erosion of ethical knowledge, we can and should maintain ethical confidence. How could that be? One possible understanding of what Williams has in mind is the sceptical idea of moral confidence as a mental state divorced from rationality and brought about instead by the free agent's sovereign decision. This "existentialist" approach to ethics, associated with Nietzsche, is often enough ascribed to the author of *Truth and Truthfulness*, but there are many reasons for questioning this attribution, not the least being the fact that, in ELP, Williams outwardly rejects it. Another possibility, one explored most notably by Miranda Fricker, is that Williams makes a use of the notion of confidence to characterise not a desirable, from the point of view of morality, psychological or mental state of a competent moral agent, but rather her action itself.

The goal of my paper is to sketch an outline of a model of practical deliberation within which confidence makes sense. I agree with the many commentators who claim that Williams' critique is primarily aimed at the project of intellectualist (to use Gilbert Ryle's term) cognitivism in ethics, as well as with the much smaller group of those who think his attack is successful. I don't, however, believe that the refutation of intellectualist cognitivism in ethics implies moral scepticism. I want to suggest that, by championing confidence rather than conviction, Williams argues implicitly for an unorthodox approach to action, in which deliberation does not follow the patterns of theoretical thinking, but is instead inherently practical. Unlike the orthodox model of action, which sees the agent as a basically immutable rational creator of future states of affairs, the model I believe Williams to subscribe to construes of the agent as essentially dependent, in her identity and in her capacity for continued action, on the outcomes of her own decisions. I will argue that such an agent is necessarily committed, on the one hand, to identify very strongly with the preconceptions of her own community, and on the other, to take into account (and to enter into a dialogue

with) the beliefs, including moral beliefs, of other people and communities with which she finds herself confronted. The capacity to in this way continuously enlarge and perfect one's moral outlook is, I want to suggest, what Williams means by ethical confidence; the last point of my paper will be to examine to what extent his position can be understood as a form of anti- intellectualist moral cognitivism.

## Geraldine Ng (University of Reading): Blame without Reasons

Of the many attitudes and feelings that are constitutive of our ethical relationships, an essential one is blame. Bernard Williams recognises that our ordinary conception of blame poses a problem for scepticism about external reasons: “[I]t may seem a rather obvious fact about blame that someone can be blamed even though his *S* does not contain anything that would lead to the appropriate motivations: we can blame a man (we may think) for neglecting his wife even though he has no motivations to be concerned about his wife. So if blame is necessarily connected with reasons, it seems to be necessarily connected with external reasons.”<sup>1</sup>

First, I consider Williams’s various responses: we can say other things in disapprobation, or we might concede that it is a ‘hard case’, or we might ‘proleptically’ blame the husband. Next, I argue that Williams’s responses are in different ways unsatisfactory. I go on to propose a practice-based view of blame that conserves both reasons internalism and our intuitions about the scope of blame.

Williams’s internalism embraces a procedural conception of practical reasons, according to which the practical requirement to hold a certain end is made indirectly by the relation of that end to other ends the agent *A* already holds in his subjective motivational set *S*.<sup>2</sup> Williams’s view of reasons for action can be formulated as the *internalist reasons restriction*: *A*’s reasons are restricted to facts about actions that would serve *A*’s subjective motivational set *S*.<sup>3</sup>

Alternatively, according to reasons externalism, *A* may be required to hold some end, regardless of what else is true about *A*. Hence, if blame is necessarily connected with reasons, it appears that while we can blame the negligent husband (*A*) for failing to act otherwise and failing to conform with external reasons, we cannot blame *A* for failing to conform with internal reasons he does not actually have. Call this the *blame-implies-reasons restriction*: Blame is restricted to reasons to act otherwise that relate to *A*’s *S*.

The statement ‘*A* has a reason to *x*’ can be interpreted in two ways, according to Williams, either as an external or as an internal reason statement. On his internalist interpretation, the statement is taken to mean ‘*A* has a reason to *x* if there is a sound deliberative route from *A*’s subjective motivational set [*S*] to *A*’s *x*-ing’, where *S* is *A*’s existing set of desires, preferences, evaluations, and other psychological states in virtue of which he can be motivated to act.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, on an externalist interpretation, reasons are independent of our motivational set. A corollary of internalism is that if a certain end, say the end of caring for one’s wife, is unrelated to other ends the agent *A* already holds in his subjective motivational set *S*, it appears to

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<sup>1</sup> IROB: 41, footnote omitted.

<sup>2</sup> Williams takes *S*, what he calls the ‘subjective motivational set’, to “contain such things as dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects, as they may be abstract called, embodying the commitments of the agent.” (IER: 105).

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Brad Hooker for suggesting this way of formalising the issue in terms of various restrictions.

<sup>4</sup> This is Williams’s preferred formulation, in Millgram, ed., 2001: 91.



remove *A* from the scope of blame and responsibility.<sup>5</sup> This gives rise to the *bluff and browbeating problem*: If *A* is beyond the scope of blame and responsibility, then blame is mere bluff and browbeating.<sup>6</sup>

Williams has three answers. First, he emphasises that we can say other things about *A* – we can criticise *A* for being heartless, cruel, despicable, etcetera. But, assuming that blame is necessarily connected to internal reasons, the blame-implies-reasons restriction, we cannot in the ordinary sense blame *A*. Next, certainly there will be examples that are deemed ‘hard cases’.<sup>7</sup> Here the internalist must bite the bullet and accept that blame is inappropriate. Notice that to hold onto our ordinary conception of blame ‘hard cases’ must be the exception. Last, Williams defends what he terms the ‘*proleptic*’ operations of blame, which refers to reasons an agent ‘might have had’.<sup>8</sup> He defends a *qualified blame-implies-reasons restriction*: Blame is restricted to *proleptic* reasons *A might have had* to act otherwise that relate to *A*’s *S*.

I will argue that Williams does not rebut intuitively compelling complaints. I go on to suggest shifting the emphasis away from reasons and that, rather than trying to improve the blame-implies-reasons restriction, we sidestep it. Finally, I propose what I call the *practice-based proposition*: When *B* blames *A*, blame has ethical force in virtue of *B*’s submission, in blaming *A*, of the assumption that *A* has a general interest in being the sort of person whom others respect.

This constitutive account of the practical operations of blame affords reasons internalists a way to preserve our common sense intuitions about the scope of blame. A practice-based view frees us from the grip of the idea that blame is necessarily connected with reasons, and so from a key threat to internalism about reasons.

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<sup>5</sup> This is a different issue from the central dispute of externalists, that if an agent does not recognize a moral reason as a reason for her she is not motivated by it.

<sup>6</sup> For a related discussion about reasons, see IER: 111.

<sup>7</sup> According to Williams an agent is a ‘hard case’ in this sense: “It is precisely people who are regarded as lacking any general disposition to respect the reaction of others that we cease to blame, and regard as hopeless or dangerous characters, rather than thinking that blame is appropriate to them”. IROB: 43. In §6, I will discuss hard cases in detail.

<sup>8</sup> HFW: 16.

## Lilian O'Brien (University of Helsinki): Acting Without Thinking

Bernard Williams bids us to consider the following kind of case:

*Drowning:* Your spouse is drowning before your eyes. An unknown other is also in peril, but you can only save one at a time. You immediately try to save your spouse. Once they are safe, you turn to the other. Tragically, she does not survive. When challenged about prioritizing your spouse at the expense of the other's life, you say "I am devastated. But (i) *I had to* turn to my partner first. And in truth, I (ii) *didn't deliberate* about whom I should try to save first."

Such cases have been taken to highlight a tension between an agent's commitments and the allegedly impersonal demands of morality. But I will argue that they also manifest a tension between *commitment* and *autonomous agency*. If, as some philosophers think, we should be troubled by the question of how (or if) an intention formed much earlier could have rational or normative authority for an agent if she is autonomous (e.g. Ferrero, L. 2010; Nefsky, J. and Tenenbaum, S. forthcoming), shouldn't we also be troubled about the constraining hand of commitment? And shouldn't we be all the more puzzled by this when commitment seems to travel with some kind of (i) volitional incapacity/necessity (Watson, 2004) and (ii) the silencing of deliberation?

A first step in getting to grips with this worry is to better understand the *psychology of commitment*. I develop a novel account of the psychology of the agent who plays – and identifies with playing – a social role, such as that of a loving partner, or parent, or friend. I argue that when one fully identifies with such a role, one comes to *hold oneself to the standards that are constitutive of the role*. In the case of the role of loving partner, for example, key practical standards are protecting and supporting one's partner, sharing one's life with them, and so on.

But what is it to hold oneself to such standards? It is, I argue, to regard oneself as evaluable in light of the standards. More specifically, it is to view oneself as a *success or failure as a person* depending on whether one complies with the standards or not. Psychologically speaking, the impact on the agent of identifying with roles is a matter of profound changes in their reflexive evaluative attitudes.

In addition, I argue that holding oneself to such standards involves significant changes in dispositions to act and deliberate: one ordinarily treats the demands of the roles one identifies with, not as *reasons* – even weighty reasons – in one's practical deliberation, but as *strict requirements* on one to act. If this is correct, it means that in a wide array of contexts treating pressing needs of loved ones as mere reasons for action, rather than as requirements to act, is to fail to act in accordance with the constitutive standards of being a loving partner or parent or friend. This sheds light, in turn, on the psychology of the agent who, as in Drowning, undergoes (i) volitional incapacity/necessity and (ii) an absence of deliberation. Both features are explained by the fact that identifying with the social role of partner involves regarding certain actions as *strictly required*.

Where does this leave us in addressing the puzzle of commitment's compatibility with autonomy? In the final section of the paper I do not aim to answer this large question, but I sound a somewhat pessimistic note. I argue that in rational planning

agents who adopt and identify with practical roles (such as that of loving partner) there arises a division between two facets of *executive* agency: acting on reasons that have been considered in a recent deliberation, on one hand, and acting on requirements that flow from roles, plans, and policies, which have been adopted much earlier, on the other. When “volitional necessities/incapacities” show up in the latter case, I maintain that they are not a benign form of “deliberative necessity” (Watson *ibid.*). This is because they issue from a *technocratic form of deliberation*. This kind of deliberation is exclusively concerned with working out the details of how to execute plans and comply with roles. It is not concerned with questions about the value of those plans and roles, or indeed, whether there is sufficient reason to adopt them. While this division of labour is efficient, and can facilitate swift and skillful execution, it can work against and diminish the agent’s autonomy, rather than enhance it.

To return, finally, to Drowning, it seems that we must address a key question about the case if we are to adjudicate in the matter of the agent’s autonomy: does her response flow from the “technocratic deliberation” of which rational planning agents are capable, or is the volitional necessity of a more benign sort? This distinction in types of deliberation and volitional necessity has not been noted in the literature, but deserves our attention if we are to equip ourselves to answer the deep challenge that Williams poses for us in cases like Drowning.

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A Shelter from Luck:  
The Roots, Point, and Purity of the Morality System

The “morality system,” Bernard Williams concludes at the end of *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, is “a deeply rooted and still powerful misconception of life” (2011, 218). It combines, in ways that Williams finds problematic, certain quite special conceptions of value, motivation, obligation, practical necessity, responsibility, voluntariness, blame, and guilt. But any attempt to characterise the morality system risks degenerating into a laundry list of things that Williams happened to dislike. To see what holds the many characteristics of the morality system together, we have to understand what this deeply rooted misconception is rooted in: we have to take a view of it that is sympathetic enough to reveal what genuine human needs the system answers to. The morality system may be a misconception, but it is not simply a misconception. If Williams calls it a “system,” it is because there are reasons for just those features to come together in just that way. Once we see the point of the system, we will be in a better position to see what is wrong with it, and why “we would be better off without it” (2011, 193).

When Williams remarks that we would be better off without the morality system, he does not mean that we would be better off without concepts like obligation, voluntariness, or blame. As I propose to argue, his position subtly combines vindicatory explanations of why we have these notions in the first place with a critical evaluation of the particular shape they take in the morality system. He invites us not so much to reject these notions as to cut them down to human size and to place them alongside other conceptual resources. We will better understand just how peculiar the morality system’s elaborations of these notions are if we can contrast them with a different understanding of them which helps us to see what they do for us when they are not in the service of the system. This vindicatory part of Williams’s account contributes just as much to leading us out of the morality system as the more critical part, giving us some positive indication of what, on a revised understanding, we need these notions to be. It helps us “make some sense of the ethical as opposed to throwing out the whole thing because we can’t have an idealized version of it” (2009, 203). Only when placed against the backdrop of a rectified understanding of the notions seized upon by the morality system do their peculiar distortions within that system become fully apparent.

To consider the morality system’s deepest roots thus involves not just the task of understanding why the morality system gives notions like voluntariness or obligation the shape it does, but also the prior task of understanding why these notions are there to be harnessed by the morality system in the first place. Synthesising Williams’s scattered remarks on these issues, I will sketch how certain basic and generic human needs provide vindicatory explanations of why there should be a distinction between the moral and the non-moral in the first place (§1), as well as an idea of obligation (§2), a distinction between voluntary and involuntary actions (§3), and a practice of blame (§4). I will then bring into the story the needs explaining the “particular development of the ethical” that is the morality system and its “special significance in modern Western culture” (2011, 7). I shall argue that the main point of the morality system, its animating ambition and organizing principle, is to provide a shelter from luck (§5). Finally, I will show how this aspiration of the morality system to provide a shelter from luck generates two problems: it robs useful concepts of their grip on the world we live in, and it generates an incompatibility between our ethical ideas and our naturalistic ideas that ultimately entrains a kind of nihilism about value and scepticism about agency. To overcome these problems, I suggest, it is not enough to accept that contingency and luck pervade human life. We also need to revise our understanding of what the facts of contingency and luck entail, in particular, we need to shed the persistent

we need blame to be: we can enrich Williams's predominantly critical remarks on what blame needs *not* to be with a predominantly vindicatory account of what blame *needs* to be, an account on which blame peculiarly combines forward- and backward-looking aspects which only *jointly* allow it to perform its function as an indispensable instrument of social life. Blame recruits people into a particular ethical sensibility and can help in holding together a community of people who share this ethical sensibility, but it can only perform this function if it is not understood merely as a tool to such ends. By understanding this, we can vindicate the thought that blame is an instrument of social control while allowing for its peculiarities in our account of what it is.



