



The Problem of Blame: Making Sense of Moral Anger

McCormick, Kelly, Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp. xii + 224, \$141.95 (hardback).

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McCormick, Kelly, *The Problem of Blame: Making Sense of Moral Anger*, Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp. xii + 224, \$141.95 (hardback).

Kelly McCormick's *The Problem of Blame* aims to resolve a tension. On the one hand, blame seems to be a valuable social tool. On the other hand, it seems punitive and potentially unnecessary or unjustified. Can we make a case for blame, given its costs?


The book has two parts. The first examines blame's permissibility. Chapter 1 introduces the problem and clarifies that the permissibility of the reactive attitudes is at issue. Chapter 2 considers the concept of basic desert, and what can be said about concepts that, by their nature, cannot be analysed further. After proposing basic desert be understood in terms of fittingness of reactive attitudes, Chapter 3 looks at the scope of these attitudes and their content. Chapter 4 then presents a companions-in-innocence/guilt argument: if we are sceptical about the fittingness of our reactive attitudes, we ought to also be sceptical of our moral judgments of wrongness. Additionally, given some similarities between our perceptual experiences and emotional experiences (of which the reactive attitudes are a subset), these emotions provide indirect evidence for the existence of moral reasons that would render their content correct.

The second half of the book looks at whether eliminativism is warranted even if blame is impermissible. Chapter 5 argues that blame eliminativists need to do more than point to errors by realists; they need to also show that blame preservation via revisionism is unwarranted. Chapter 6 considers theories of reference *vis-à-vis* claims about free will. Chapter 7 examines whether arguments that belief in free will produces unsavoury consequences, can motivate eliminativism.

As this summary indicates, the book gives less attention to blaming expressions or interactions than might be expected given it is specifically aimed at defending 'reactive blame—the angry, harmful variety'. Rather, McCormick provides a deep dive into the methodological issues surrounding blame scepticism and eliminativism, their different forms, and various choice-points that theorists face.

Some moral responsibility and blame theorists may not find the book helpful for settling any mixed feelings unless they possess expertise further afield or trust McCormick's handling of those issues. For example, Chapter 4 invokes a 'moral problem'-style convergence argument and a Moorean open question argument at crucial junctures. Chapter 6 relies heavily on arguments regarding folk concepts, essences,

referents, and the concept of free will. Those inclined to such topics—especially those sympathetic to Caruso and Pereboom—will find interesting terrain to consider.

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